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CHAPTERS

OF

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY,

BY

SIR JOHN WALSH, BART.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	Page
On the Administration of Lord Grey, from the Opening of the first Reformed Parliament to his Retirement . . .	1

CHAPTER II.

Remarks on the Composition and Character of the first Reformed Parliament	38
--	----

CHAPTER III.

On the Conservative Party	66
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

The House of Lords	90
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

On the Objects of the Movement or Radical Party . . .	98
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

On the State of Ireland	114
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTERS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

On the Administration of Lord Grey, from the opening of the
First Reformed Parliament to his Retirement.

THOSE who see, in the dissolution of Lord Grey's Cabinet, the mere result of individual difference of opinion upon insulated questions, neither comprehend its causes nor its character. Those who describe the Government of Lord Melbourne as a continuation of that of Lord Grey, with some change in the casting of the parts, and some modification of its policy, possibly misconceive—certainly misrepresent it. In the nature of its position, in the foundation of its support, in the direction and tendencies of its policy, it widely differs from, or rather is diametrically opposed to it. When the ministry of Lord Grey was broken up,—first by the secession of Lord Stanley and his friends, and subsequently by the Premier's own resignation,—it was not a Cabinet which was dissolved, it was a system of government which was overturned.

Comparatively recent as are these events, yet the public mind is so incessantly engrossed by the passing scene, that I do not think it will be superfluous to trace briefly the nature, the progress, and

the failure of the important experiment which was determined by the fate of that Administration. It was the declared purpose, and I have no doubt the sincere intention of Lord Grey's Government, to satisfy the desires of the body of the people for a more active and direct participation in political power, by the extensive changes introduced by the Reform Bill. It was their favourite position that the nation contained within its bosom no elements of hostility to our institutions, to the mixed character of our constitution, or to the framework of our society. They considered that the popular demand for Parliamentary Reform was a just and a reasonable one, and that its concession was imperatively required by the wants of an age of increased intelligence and civilization. They argued that the public mind, satisfied in this respect by a wide and liberal extension of the basis of representation, would be placed far more in harmony with the other branches of the constitution. They contended that the security of the whole fabric would be confirmed by this timely and proper concession. They believed, in short, that the spirit of Democracy in England was a mild, moderate, mitigated feeling; that it usurped no preponderance over the opinions of any class; that it was regulated and counterbalanced by attachment to our constitution, and by a sentiment of respect for the higher orders of our society. They conceived that it would be abundantly contented with what it had acquired; that it contained no germ of increase,—no prin-

ciple of encroachment ; and that appeased by what it had obtained, there would be no reviving appetite to satisfy by fresh concessions. They therefore proclaimed that organic change should cease with the Reform Bill (if, indeed, they admitted that measure to possess such a character) ; they calculated that the materials of resistance to further organic change would be greatly augmented by its passing ; and they held out as the practical result of it, no fresh attacks upon the great landmarks of our constitution, but a variety of useful ameliorations in the details of our ecclesiastical, legal, financial, and commercial establishments.

Giving Lord Grey and his colleagues entire credit for sincerity in the profession of these opinions, we must naturally conclude that from the passing of the Reform Bill, the aim and policy of his government was to carry them into effect. Their object would be to arrest the progress of the movement against the national institutions, to curb the appetite for speculative innovation, and to divert the restlessness and activity which late events had aroused in the public mind to the safe and useful channel of practical reform. Their policy would be almost identical with that traced out by Sir Robert Peel in his late short administration. From different points the rival parties would seem to have been impelled to the same spot.

Consistently, then, with their former opinions—with their public declarations, the policy of Lord

Grey's Cabinet ought to have been conservative,—conservative I mean in the sense in which I have always used the word—and which I shall in the progress of this sketch take occasion to define. *Ought* to have been! I will go a step farther, and assert that *it was* conservative. Whatever may have been the faults of execution,—whatever may have been the vacillation of purpose,—whether failure arose from mistakes in conduct, or from the inherent difficulties in the subject, I shall proceed to examine. But, I assume, that the Ministry of Lord Grey, from the passing of the Reform Bill, undertook the task of amalgamating the new matter which they had introduced with the old materials, which they had declared that they prized and would preserve. Certainly, to no other hands could this task of fusion be more properly entrusted; and everything seemed to conspire to favour the attempt, and to launch the vessel from the dock in which she had undergone such extensive alterations under the most propitious auspices.

The most pressing and immediate danger which had menaced the stability of the new system at its very outset, had been the state of foreign politics. No one acquainted with France could have failed to perceive that things rapidly tended towards a new crisis in that country. The Republican party, flushed with the triumphs of the 'three glorious days of July,'—heated with the recollections of the ascendancy at home, and their victories abroad in the early period of the first revolution,—openly

assailed the throne of Louis Philippe. Whether they had been in the first instance surprised into an acquiescence in his elevation,—whether they had from the beginning only contemplated it as a temporary arrangement, a mere transition state,—or whether they had been exasperated by the subsequent course of his policy,—the result was the same. They had determined to attempt the overthrow of the new dynasty before it should have had time to consolidate its power.

Until this attempt should be defeated, and the Republican party foiled, the throne of Louis Philippe was not safe a single day. There were two ways in which any fresh revolution in France would have exerted an immediate and powerful influence upon our domestic affairs. The active and intimate sympathy of political feeling between the two countries rendered it certain that the establishment of a democratic Republic in France would react strongly upon us. Democracy would have received an impulse in England, both from the moral force and authority it would have acquired by its triumphant establishment with so powerful a neighbour; and not less from the positive support and countenance that it would have received in a variety of ways, direct and indirect, from the restless and intriguing spirit of French propagandism.

The second mode by which this event would have affected us, would have been by the European war it would inevitably have kindled. The ministerial party has taken to itself no small share of

credit for the preservation of peace, and has exulted in no gentle strain in the fallacy of a prediction of Lord Ashburton, that it would surpass human skill to maintain it six months. It is always invidious to detract from the merits of success ; but the causes here appear to me so obvious, that I cannot fear incurring the charge of illiberality in imputing it, in this instance, more to their good fortune than to their address. The throne of Louis Philippe was the palladium of the peace of Europe. It was to the course of policy of that monarch that its preservation is to be ascribed.

That the three great absolute powers regarded the overthrow of the Bourbons as an event injurious to their interests, if not menacing to their safety, there can be little doubt. But that they should attempt forcibly to reimpose them upon the French nation would be to impute to them an inconceivable degree of blindness and temerity. In Louis Philippe they recognized a sovereign of royal blood, the next in succession to the excluded line. By his position he inevitably became the opponent of those democratic principles which were far more dangerous to them than the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. His great object evidently was to tranquillize France, and to consolidate his power by curbing the restless parties which agitated its bosom. His policy as respected foreign nations was clearly pacific. He displayed none of the passion for aggrandisement

of Louis XIV. or of Napoleon, and he cautiously repressed the inclination for it in the nation. His whole conduct evinced vigour, sagacity, firmness, and consummate address. They must have felt at once that in defending his own throne against secret societies, military adventurers, and republican ideas, he was in fact fighting their battle against their most dangerous foe. They must have seen that he was their strongest bulwark and their advanced guard against republicanism. No one could contend against its formidable influence with greater power; no one, not even themselves, had a nearer interest in opposing its encroachments. That they may have regarded the circumstances of his elevation with repugnance, or the representative institutions by which he was surrounded without cordiality, may be readily believed. That they should be carried by these shades of feeling to seek the demolition of a barrier by which they were themselves defended, is to ascribe to them a stupid bigotry of absolutism of which those politic cabinets have never shown a symptom. Their attitude therefore was one of watchful observation, and of anxious preparation for the event. Europe was one wide circle of bristling bayonets. With Louis Philippe, there could be peace—with anything that should rise on his overthrow, there must be war.

As we read in the tales of chivalry of armies confronted together, watching with intense interest the encounter of some approved champions, to whose skill and valour they had confided the

arbitrement of their quarrel, so, the confederated hosts looked on in stern immobility, waiting the determination of that important struggle, as the signal either for repose or for prompt and decisive action.

The events of the 5th and 6th of June, 1832, decided this question, crushed the present hopes of the Republicans, and flung them upon a dim and doubtful future, confirmed the throne of Louis Philippe, and established an ascendancy he has ever since been strengthening.

This great check to the progress of the democratic movement on the Continent, which may be said to have stopped the torrent of revolution in every one of her states, occurred precisely at the epoch of the passing of the Reform Bill. Lord Grey, who at home had just achieved an important party triumph, thus saw peace and social order at the same time secured upon the Continent, and the extreme movement party here deprived of external support, and discouraged by the failure of their continental friends.

Nor was the situation of domestic affairs less favourable to the maintenance of a policy of resistance to democratic encroachment than our external position. The flourishing state and increasing prosperity of our commercial and manufacturing establishments, deprived faction and sedition of the powerful support they must always derive from their depression and distress, even when arising from causes wholly beyond the control of a government.

It has long been an intimate conviction of mine that the distinctions of Whig and Tory, as the designations of any two intelligible systems of politics opposed to each other, belonged to the last century—to a state of things wholly different from the present. I feel persuaded that had things gone on in their former track for ten years longer, so as to have removed the patriarchs of Brookes's from the stage of public life, the terms would have become wholly obsolete. There would have been a thorough fusion of the two parties, as there had long been an approximation of opinions. There would, indeed, have been great political parties in the state, but the identity of persons or of names which these would have had with Whigs or Tories would have been lost, as the identity of principles has long been.

The hazard which placed Lord Grey at the head of the Administration, occasioned a revival of the spirit and feelings of the party of which he had been through life so distinguished a leader. His mind was probably imbued with the recollections of the past; it had been formed to public life among the contentions of other periods, and his accession to power rallied round his standard all that remained of the old school of Whigs, while the dazzle of the Reform Bill threw around them a halo of popularity.

The preponderating majority of Whigs in the first Reformed Parliament was no criterion of the strength of that party in the country. It arose out

of circumstances of a temporary nature, and was principally to be traced to the popularity which the authors and successful champions of the Reform Bill naturally enjoyed among the new constituencies which it had created. To whatever cause it may be traced, however, it certainly existed. The elections of December, 1832, returned two-thirds of the whole number decided Whigs. Thus the party who, three or four years before, had existed but in a few select coteries in the metropolis, which the rising generation had viewed but as the lingering and curious relics of an antecedent epoch, which had but just escaped, by the death of Canning, being finally absorbed in the blaze of his genius, had revived to sway the destinies of the nation. Backed by an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons, supported by a popular cry in the country, Lord Grey seemed the most powerful Minister who had directed the councils of the nation since the days of Pitt. And powerful indeed he was. He might have carried vote by ballot, or universal suffrage, or annual parliaments; he might have expelled the Bishops from the Lords, or created 300 new Peers, or revoked the patents of 200 old ones. He might have reduced the whole of the army, and established a national guard. He might have abolished tithes, and substituted any provision, or no provision, for the Clergy. He might have repealed twenty millions of taxes, and paid the fundholders 7s. in the pound. There was scarcely any innova-

tion, feeding delusive expectations and fanning morbid excitement, which he could not have accomplished. But he undertook a more arduous enterprise. He endeavoured to regulate the march and direct the momentum of the machine he had set in motion. He conceived that he could hold it in his hands and use it as he pleased, applying a small portion of its power, and suffering the superfluous strength to evaporate and escape in harmless profusion.

After having convulsed the nation, after having roused every passion, stimulated every hope, awakened the latent energies of cupidity and ambition in one part of the community, and kindled deep resentment in another, he fancied that he could bid all this excitement subside at his command, and revert to the regular march of settled government. In one twelvemonth from that time he could not find among his 400 supporters a member who could venture to accept a Lordship of the Treasury lest he should lose his seat.

He recommenced the course of practical improvement in details which, in fact, had been the policy of preceding Administrations ever since Mr. Canning's entrance into the Cabinet in 1822. He was prepared indeed to work out his ameliorations at a somewhat more rapid rate, and on a larger scale, but their scope and tendency was substantially the same. Measures of this practical character and circumscribed operation fell with the blighting chill of disappointment upon the highly wrought

imaginations and excited hopes of the reforming masses of 1831 and 1832. It was in vain that the ministerial writers puffed the Bank Charter, and the opening of the China trade, and the Scotch Municipal Bill, and Irish Church Temporalities Bill;—the people gazed, wondered, and said,—Is this all?

He subjected his popularity to still severer trials, by the introduction of the Irish Coercion Bill: a measure, however necessary in itself, giving a virtual contradiction (and the more necessary the measure the more complete the contradiction) to all the arguments and professions of the Whigs on similar questions for half a century past. Its provisions, far more severe and stringent than those of any former bill of the kind, had obviously been rendered necessary by the relaxation of all the ordinary and legal modes of repression during the last two years. It was founded upon the basis of the connexion, either virtual or positive, of Mr. O'Connell's political agitation with the outrages and crimes which disorganized society in many counties: a position which was much laboured by the ministerial leaders, and as stoutly combated by Mr. O'Connell; but it left them in this dilemma, that if the chain of connexion were not established, they were introducing glaring and unnecessary infringements of the constitutional liberties of the subject, in all those parts of their bill which were aimed at the repression of political agitation; and if it was, they were then liable to the charge of

having fostered and created this state of things by their laxity during the last two years, and even by a sort of tacit alliance with Mr. O'Connell during the progress of the Reform Bill.

The moderate and conservative character of Lord Grey's policy during the last eighteen months of his administration, and the strong contrast which it offered to his previous course, have been very slightly glanced at by party writers. Those of his own side, instead of dwelling upon these features, had an obvious motive in disguising them. They were intent on describing them as the legitimate fruits of the Reform Bill,—as enactments of the most popular character,—as vast benefits conferred upon the community by the agency of that law,—as mighty innovations in favour of popular rights, wrung from the tenacious grasp of oligarchical monopoly by the power it had called into being.

They were the best people to proclaim to the electors of Finsbury, Glasgow, Marylebone, &c., that the Cabinet were more anxious to lull and to tranquillize the popular effervescence, than to feed it with fresh aliment. They were not the men to announce to the whole body of £10 householders that the measures of Government had no longer any distinctive democratic characteristics ; that they were many of them highly beneficial improvements, but that they were of a practical tendency, calculated to harmonize with, and not to sap, the aristocratical and monarchical parts of our constitution. They could not be expected to inform the

people that these measures were addressed to the intellect and judgment of a deliberative council, not to the passions and prejudices of a popular assembly. They would not desire to point out that in many of the features of their policy, they coincided with their predecessors, and that instead of running counter to the opinions and views of the Conservatives, the majority of their ameliorations had been supported by that party.

If the ministerial advocates were disinclined to draw public attention to this view of the subject, the Conservatives were not more disposed to do so. They naturally entertained strong irritation against the Whigs. They had no confidence in their steadiness in any line of policy which should compromise their popularity : they felt that while the Government received the disinterested support of their votes in almost all the measures which they brought forward, they shrunk from the obligation.

They perceived, on the other hand, that while the Democratic or Radical party opposed the Ministers on almost every occasion, the latter were constantly coquetting with them, deprecating their hostility, and endeavouring to win back their favour. In fact, nothing was so repugnant to the Grey Ministry as appearing to coincide in the views and sentiments of the Conservatives. It was essential to the preservation of their moral influence with the community, that their position should be kept distinct from that of their ancient opponents. They wished to occupy a middle station, fortified by the

support of all the moderate portion of the community, between the partisans of extreme democratic principles, and the defenders of old High Tory doctrines. But to effect this it was necessary to find some champion of this latter cause. It is inconceivable to what an intense degree the old party animosity and rivalry influenced their conduct. The habit of opposition to all whom by any political pedigree they could fancy the legitimate successors of Mr. Pitt had become an instinct, and no success appeared to them complete which did not include a triumph over these early foes.

Nothing would have been more agreeable to them than to have seen Sir Robert Peel defending the divine right of kings, or preaching a crusade in Europe for the restoration of the Bourbons, or recommending, by way of beginning, that we should vote a subsidy of a hundred millions to the three Northern Powers. But as the Conservatives of 1833 showed no disposition to advocate such doctrines, it was the Ministers' next object to preserve a distinction as marked as the difference was faint, to impute to their opponents opinions they did not entertain, and to brand every deviation from them as apostacy or dissimulation.

It is not surprising that the Conservatives should have maintained a corresponding attitude of distrust and hostility, that they should have contented themselves with supporting each measure successively on its own separate merits, without giving credit to the Ministry for a policy which they

seemed furtively to pursue, and ostensibly to disclaim. They saw also, in the march of that policy, so much of hesitation and uncertainty—there seemed so much of division in the Ministerial councils, and such a desire among many of them to go over to the Radical camp—that they felt no security in its continuance.

Let us now briefly enumerate some of the principal measures, and allude to a few of the speeches and public declarations of the Whigs during these Sessions of 1833 and 1834, which will, I think, corroborate the views I have taken in the preceding pages.

The three most prominent acts of the Session of 1833, were the Irish Coercion Bill, the Irish Church Temporalities Bill, and the Emancipation of the Slaves Bill.

Of the first, it will be readily conceded, that it was an enactment of a precisely similar character with those temporary laws passed from time to time by the Administrations of the Tory school, arming the executive with extra constitutional power. Their mutual object was the repression of offences against society springing out of an organized system, and with a presumed political end. They were all equally levelled against the alliance of Catholicism and Democracy, which has established so formidable an influence; and the only difference was, that in the severity of its provisions, and the authority with which it armed the executive, it considerably exceeded any former bill. This bill

was supported by the Conservatives, on the ground of urgent necessity adduced by the Minister, through all its stages.

The Church Temporalities Bill seemed to be put forward by the Cabinet as the great popular measure of the Session. It contained, on its first introduction, three principles which were in the highest degree objectionable to the Conservative party. 1st, The dangerous and palpable sophism, that wherever by legal enactment a new value was created or rendered available to any description of property, such increase was not the right of the owner of such property, but of the state which passed the law. This mischievous fallacy was obviously capable of an application entirely subversive of the security of property of every description. It was completely exposed and refuted by Sir Robert Peel, and abandoned by its supporters. 2ndly, The 147th clause, which was the practical application of this doctrine, and placed the proceeds of the sales of Church leaseholds at the disposal of Parliament. This clause was struck out. 3rdly, The taxation of the livings of existing incumbents. This part of the Bill was relinquished, and its operation made purely prospective. Another important concession was yielded to a masterly speech of Sir Robert Peel, by altering the scale of taxation upon livings, and commencing it with livings of 300*l.* instead of 200*l.* per annum.

After these objectionable parts had been removed, I do not hesitate to say, that the measure

appeared to me to contain no dangerous principle. It was a new distribution of a portion of the Church property to purposes highly conducive to its interests; it provided a substitute for a highly unpopular impost, (the church-rate,) and I regret that the Conservatives partly opposed it on the third reading; an opposition, however, which was not persevered in by the Lords.

Every one who has considered the question of Slavery will acknowledge that the abolition must have appeared an experiment hazardous to the prosperity of our colonies. The matter, however, had become not one of interest or calculation, but of principle; and no minister could have had either the right or the power to withstand the unanimous voice of a whole nation, determined to waive all considerations of expediency, to encounter all risks of loss, to relinquish any commercial advantage, rather than continue a state of things which shocked its moral and religious feeling. Disinterestedness is the rarest of all virtues in nations or any large masses of men; and no minister need be afraid that the precedent of concession to such a feeling will be drawn to any ruinous length. All that justice required was, that such an experiment should be made at the cost of the nation which had originally sanctioned and encouraged what it now condemned, not of the individuals who had invested their property under the guarantee of existing laws. This claim was satisfied by the grant of 20,000,000*l.*, and the Conservatives supported this measure throughout.

Of the other important subjects, which were introduced by the Government, too, the renewal of the East India and Bank Charters were forced upon them by the expiration of the old ones, and would as a matter of necessity have been brought forward by any Ministry for the time being. They excited no party feeling, they involved no question which brought the principles of the contending parties into collision; they were not violently opposed by either of the great corporations primarily interested, and they created little sensation when compared with their magnitude. I remember being much struck with the forlorn appearance of the thin House which lent its languid and careless attention to the speech of Mr. Charles Grant, on the second reading of the India Bill. But, on questions even of great national importance which did not appeal to the passions, and did not rouse the spirit of party, the first Reformed Parliament was as apathetic and indifferent as its unreformed predecessors.

The discussion of the merits or defects of these measures would form a separate volume. It is my object only to consider them with relation to the general tendency and temper of Lord Grey's Administration, and the indications which its manner of dealing with these great questions showed of its disposition to check the movement. Viewed under this aspect, they introduced no extensive innovations, they signalized no gross abuses; and in the changes which they made, they upheld the general

outline of the systems which they found. It is foreign to my purpose to enter into an examination of details. I will not decide whether the appointments of Mr. Macaulay and his coadjutors will have a favourable effect upon the internal administration of our Indian empire,—whether due precaution has been adopted in reconciling the Chinese to the throwing open the tea trade,—or whether the best terms were obtained in the negotiation with the Bank. It is only necessary for me to observe, that whatever may have been the mistakes or the merits in the provisions of these measures, there is nothing in their scope or spirit which might not have been consistently introduced by Lord Liverpool, Mr. Canning, Mr. Huskisson, the Duke of Wellington, or Sir Robert Peel. The bills of legal reform it would be presumptuous in an unprofessional person to discuss, but to a superficial observer they seemed to have the same characteristics. They made, in accordance with the suggestions of a Board of Commissioners, some progress, and I dare say properly directed, in the arduous task of simplifying the operation of our laws, and disembarassing them of their cumbrous and expensive forms. But they introduced no new principle of jurisprudence,—they changed none of the relations of property, they dealt with forms and technicalities only.

The Scotch Corporation Bill appeared to me to be more of a propitiatory sacrifice to the Movement, than any other bill introduced during this

Session, certainly more than the Irish Church Bill, which they seemed to consider as their *cheval de bataille*.

In the ordinary course of its administration, still more than in these new measures, was the conservative tendency of Lord Grey's Government rendered apparent. They pushed economical retrenchment in the various departments of the public service to a still greater extent, indeed, than their predecessors. But in this as in other instances their track was the same, although they might have followed it further. Nor was it a reproach to the former Administration, that having led the way, and effected great reductions, they still left something to be accomplished. It is necessarily a work of trial, labour, and tedious, cautious investigation, to remodel establishments in which any disorder introduced would occasion such detriment to the community. One change effected clears the way, and points out the means of others. Modes of saving gradually suggest themselves to close and continued attention; the course of nature gives opportunities of effecting retrenchments without individual injury, which could not be all at once done without gross injustice. I am not depreciating the efforts of the Whig Cabinet to diminish expenditure. One department particularly—Sir James Graham's admirable administration of the affairs of the Navy—elicited general approbation, by combining increased efficiency with diminished expense. All that I wish to show is, that they

merely followed the example which had been set them, working out the application with success, and following up to a greater extent the reductions which had been commenced.

But they maintained all the great national establishments on the same scale on which they found them. Army, Navy, Colonies, were all kept up to their accustomed point. In the mode of taxation, and the distribution of the public burthens, they proposed no change; and Lord Althorp made one of his candid admissions, that his whole opinions on the subject of finance had undergone a complete revolution since his accession to office*.

They felt themselves compelled, even at the price of much unpopularity, to resist any consider-

* I remember particularly an excellent and argumentative speech of the then Secretary at War, Sir J. Hobhouse, one of the most liberal members of the present Government, in opposition to a motion of Mr. Hume's, for the reduction of the number of the standing army. It made an impression upon me, because I had previously taken in my own mind a precisely similar view of the subject, and was rather mortified when I found myself anticipated. The pith of his reasoning was this, that a standing army in time of peace was established for two purposes: 1st, As a support to the laws, and an instrument for preserving the ascendancy of the civil power over any turbulent disposition of the multitude, and therefore that its number ought to bear a certain proportion to that of the population. 2ndly, As a preparation for a war, and nucleus of defence against foreign aggression; and, therefore, that its numbers ought to bear a certain proportion to those of the disciplined armies of neighbouring powers; and as both our population at home, and the military forces of our neighbours were greatly increased since 1792, our armies must be increased also.

able reduction of taxation. Their course of proceeding in rescinding the resolution of the House respecting the Repeal of the Malt Tax, must be familiar to our recollection; and I hope that the disinterested support they received from Sir Robert Peel on that occasion, and on the motion for a repeal of the House and Window Tax, is also remembered. In the Session of 1834, up to the period of Lord Stanley and his friends' retirement, the same conservative policy was maintained, and the majority of their measures met with no opposition from the Conservative party.

The Poor Laws Amendment Bill, the Church Rates Bill, and the Irish Tithes Bill, corroborate this statement. Perhaps those of my readers who may not have watched through all their tortuous windings, the party manœuvres of that period, may be surprised at my classing the last among the measures which were supported by the Conservatives. It is, however, an important fact, which ought constantly to be borne in mind, that the Ministry of Lord Grey, comprising in the list of the Cabinet almost all the leading members of the present Government, did prepare and introduce a measure for the settlement of the Irish Tithe question, which was passed on the second reading by a majority of 248 to 52, which was accepted by the Irish Protestant members, which was supported by the Conservative party, and which was opposed only by a small minority, composed of Mr. O'Connell and his adherents, united with about a dozen

of the most Radical members. Had the Ministry but been true to each other, and consistent with themselves, this perplexing question would then have been adjusted, and all the evils which the protracted agitation of it has entailed upon both countries prevented.

I cannot close this review of the transactions of 1833 and 1834 without noticing an engine of Whig policy, which, if it was not wholly without precedent, yet from the extent to which they made use of it, and the manner in which they applied it, may fairly be considered as a novelty. I mean the appointment of Commissioners of Inquiry nominated by the Crown, to examine evidence and report upon subjects about to become matter for parliamentary legislation. There is much to be said in favour of this practice, and I am not sure that when so much has been done to weaken the executive, the indirect influence which this powerful engine places in the hands of the Minister can be considered as an objection. It has a tendency to supersede the mode of inquiry by parliamentary committees, to which, as a means of investigation, it is infinitely superior. I remember a speech of Lord Ellenborough, when a member of the Duke of Wellington's Administration, in answer to a motion for the appointment of some Committee, ridiculing their inefficiency, and containing a vivid but satirical description of their mode of transacting business. The speech alluded to was much attacked at the time as an indiscreet one; but although it might

not have been exactly prudent as coming from the lips of a Minister of the Crown, yet there was a great deal of truth in the picture.

The parliamentary committees are chosen from that portion of the House of Commons which consists of public men, who take an active part in its proceedings, and whose names become known. Their number may not exceed 100, and consequently the same member is placed upon several committees, often all sitting at the same time, and each perhaps meriting an undivided attention. If we take a committee as of about 30 nominal members, we shall find that eight or ten of these consist of official men, who must be in their bureaux all the morning, and never attend but to vote on some ministerial point; four or five young members, who make interest to be put down, for the laudable purpose of training themselves to the business of the House; the rest are composed of known names, such as Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Goulburn, Mr. Hume, Mr. Warburton, &c., whose names are upon the lists of every committee, and who, unless the subject should happen to possess a peculiar attraction for them, merely drop in occasionally, and are rather observers than active agents. The examination of evidence, the selection of witnesses, and generally the conduct of the business, devolves upon the chairman and three or four others, who may have an acquaintance with the subject. The result of this desultory mode of proceeding, as well as of the difficulties and expense in procuring the attendance of witnesses, is,

that although much valuable information may be found in the printed evidence of reports of committees, yet it is generally partial, incomplete, deficient in comprehensiveness and arrangement, and overlaid with useless and cumbrous matter.

As a contrast to this, take the proceedings of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Poor Laws. A chosen body of individuals, selected for their intimate practical acquaintance with the subject, or their enlightened study of its theory, are appointed. They devote themselves to the task with a full knowledge of the demands it must make upon their time and attention. They frame a set of queries embracing the main features of the subject, and they employ a number of assistants whose business it is to visit different parts of the country, and pursue their inquiries upon the spot. The printed queries guide the labours of the assistant as well as direct the attention of the local witnesses to the really important points. They give a systematic direction to the proceedings of the assistant-commissioners, but do not confine them to those limits only. The information thus obtained by investigations on the spot, is transmitted to the central commission, and is arranged, classified, and compared with that from other quarters. The general Report, founded upon so comprehensive a mass of evidence, must, if well executed, tend greatly to elucidate any intricate subject, to render much new information easily accessible, and to influence, in a material degree, the public opi-

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nion. Its superiority as a mode of investigation over a parliamentary committee seems to me indisputable.

But it is liable to this imputation, that whatever may be the ostensible impartiality of the Ministry, yet that as an emanation from the executive, the commission must in some degree be looked upon as the instrument of the Government. It can hardly be believed that there will not exist a considerable degree of similarity of opinion and sympathy between them, and the report will be regarded, particularly by the opponents of Ministers, as an *ex parte* statement, as a brief elaborately prepared to make out their case.

These appointments have also created a valuable patronage for Government, and probably more than counterbalanced the reductions of the old offices.

Commissions have frequently been resorted to as a means of soothing the public mind, and evading or postponing some dangerous popular demand.

Thus, on the question of military punishment. There is a strong public feeling against the system of corporal punishment, as degrading, as too severe, and unsuited to the spirit of the age. Now, the Government know perfectly well that an army must have its own code of laws, and that they must be far more arbitrary and rigid than those which govern the rest of the community. An army without strict discipline, without the means of punishment in the hands of the officers, becomes inefficient,

and only dangerous to the peaceable part of society. They know, too, that it is not at all necessary that flogging should be the peculiar mode of enforcing discipline, since several of the European armies are well disciplined with other methods of coercion. But the difficulty is, that they know, also, that the English public would find these different modes more repugnant to its sensibilities even than flogging: they know that these punishments, though perhaps less degrading,—a point which depends upon the peculiar state of feeling in a community,—are more cruel than our own. A soldier sells his knapsack—in England he is flogged, is confined to the hospital for a fortnight, and returns, without any permanent injury, to his duty. In Paris, three or four regiments are drawn out in line in the Place Vendôme, the most public square in that city; the culprit is led out in a squalid dress, and his leg being placed upon an anvil, a ponderous iron chain is riveted to his ankle, to the other end of which is attached a cannon-ball of some twenty-four pounds weight. He is then led in front of the line, trailing this appendage after him, and when this exhibition is over he is sent to the galleys for five years, during all which time he drags the cannon-ball at his heels.

Many of those who demand so loudly the abolition of the present system of corporal punishment, are not prepared for substitutes like these. They are not aware how universally it is admitted that a severe penal code can alone maintain the order and

efficiency of military discipline. The exact description of punishment may differ according to the usages and habits in different nations; but in point of severity there is no relaxation in those armies where corporal inflictions are not permitted. This plain statement of facts, which appears to be always lost sight of by popular writers, would have been too direct a collision with the feeling of the Liberals to be ventured upon by Ministers. Mr. Edward Ellice, therefore, made a guarded and cautious reply to a motion for the abolition of corporal punishment; in which he contented himself with pointing out the great relaxation of discipline which had already arisen from the extreme reluctance of commanders of regiments to inflict this punishment in opposition to the feelings of the times. He stated the strong fact that not less than one-fifth of the army stationed in England had, in the course of the last year, passed through the common gaols*; and he concluded by moving for an address to the Crown to appoint a Commission of Inquiry, which has now been sitting a year and a half. Its report will, doubtless, disabuse the public mind of many errors, strip the subject of much false colouring, and if the increased refinement of the age still demands the abolition of this species of punishment, will be prepared with some equally efficient substitute.

I regard commissions of inquiry, then, as in-

* July 21st, 1834, *Mirror of Parliament*, page 2843.

struments of great power in the hands of the Executive. First, from the patronage they create; secondly, the means they afford of postponing and evading any pressing question; thirdly, from the influence which the Minister will always possess over the report of the commissioners; fourthly, from the great superiority of the mode of investigation, the difficulty of individuals competing with a body enjoying such facilities of obtaining information, and the ease with which the commissioners may give a direction to the evidence as well as to the report.

I fear that I may weary my readers by this recapitulation, brief as I have made it, of the principal acts of the Grey Ministry subsequent to the Reform Bill. It is necessarily a dry and an ungrateful subject. Even while the interest with regard to the measures is fresh, and the attention excited by the keenness of party struggle, the public find it difficult to follow their progress. They are fatigued with the mass of cloudy oratory in which each step of the proceeding is enveloped, they are tired of the parliamentary technicalities which are often unintelligible to them, and they rejoice when these harassing demands upon their attention are finally disposed of.

I admit that the period to which I have reverted possesses but little lively or general interest. It is quite destitute of events—its history is to be found in those long parliamentary discussions and debates, so rarely illumined by intellect or eloquence.

The entangled state of parties, the false position many of them occupied, the ambiguity and uncertainty occasioned by the devious, vacillating course of the Ministry, contributed to shroud the whole in a confused maze of perplexity.

Yet I do feel that there is no recent portion of our history more pregnant with instruction to the calm and philosophic spectator, or which, now that the partial dispersion of the mist enables us to catch the leading bearings of that intricate navigation, better merits a retrospective survey.

We have heard, till reiterated assertion is taken for proof, of a century of misgovernment, a long monopoly of power, the perpetration of abuses, the rankness of corruption, the venality, extravagance, and incapacity of former ministries. Let it be remembered that Lord Grey and his colleagues held office four years—that, after having triumphantly carried the Reform Bill, they still, at the head of an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons, conducted affairs during two parliamentary sessions, and brought forward two ministerial batches of measures. Where were the corruptions detected—where were the abuses exposed—where was the prodigality checked? What materials of power and popularity would they not have acquired, if they could have denounced and held up their predecessors as political delinquents? What an unanswerable proof of the practical efficacy of their own measures and of the purity of their own intentions would they not have af-

forded, could they have materially reduced our establishments, or altered the system and scale of the different departments of the public service? Let it not be forgotten that they declared it to be impracticable to effect any of these objects—that their duty and the cogency of circumstances compelled them to maintain them as they found them; that in the reductions they made in details they rendered an honourable testimony to the conduct of their predecessors, and repeatedly acknowledged that they but pursued a path which had been already traced. Let it be borne in mind that in the great majority of their measures they received the support of the Conservatives; and let it be recollected that they were bitterly opposed by the Movement, whom they vainly tried to conciliate and soothe. They failed in their endeavour to preserve our institutions with one hand, and to satisfy with the other the ambition of democracy which they had themselves roused, and the exaggerated expectations of benefit which they had created only to disappoint. They dissolved at last, through internal disagreement and differences, indeed, but which were forced into notice and stimulated into action by the “pressure from without.” That pressure was directed all round the Cabinet, till the weakest part was found; it was then concentrated, and the shell was broken.

It is not with the sole view of undertaking the defence or the panegyric of former administrations that I would wish to point attention to these facts.

It is not to justify Mr. Pitt, or to exculpate Lord Castlereagh, or to eulogize Lord Liverpool or Mr. Canning, that I appeal to this tacit yet convincing refutation of the attacks upon their political conduct. My object is to vindicate the form of government under which they acted, lived, and died, from the charges which are so ceaselessly urged against it. If the Constitution under which we were born, and the system under which we have passed the larger portion of our lives, were in reality but one mass of abuses, but one vast conspiracy against the interest and happiness of the community, how does it arise that so complete a reform, that so entire a change of men, has thrown no light upon the concealed iniquities? I do not speak the language of party; my connexion with party has been short, and of recent date; but I revert to the opinions and feelings I have entertained from my childhood upwards. I loved the English Constitution, not because I considered it a mere machine in the hands of party, but because I thought that I saw in it the union of stability and order, with rational freedom—that I found an active, enlightened, and efficient control over the conduct of public men, without faction or turbulence—because it was liberty without the preponderance of democracy. I disbelieved in the existence of gross abuses, because I considered that they could neither have remained concealed, nor have been maintained openly under such a system. Had the recent changes drawn the curtain aside

which veiled political profligacy and corruption, I should have experienced the mortification of discovering myself the most egregious of dupes ; I should have felt the most depressing of all sensations, that of discovering the worthlessness and deceit of what had been the cherished object of my earliest veneration, which had long commanded the homage rendered to excellence and virtue.

There is another conclusion to which we are led by the contemplation of this period. The Whig Administration had every conceivable motive to separate themselves from the whole course and conduct of preceding governments. The maintenance of their distinct existence as a party, and of their power as a government, almost depended upon their pursuing a new and marked course of policy, which should offer a broad contrast to that of former cabinets. Every inducement which their strong party spirit, their bitter hostility to their opponents, the manifest expediency of keeping the extreme Liberals in good humour, dictated the adoption of such a line. Why did they not follow it? Is it not evident that they felt they had no longer space to diverge in that direction? They were too near the precipice ;—they had not left themselves room enough to exhibit a flourish of liberality ; they had to balance themselves along a narrow and slippery path, and it required all their caution and care. Were they to reduce malt, assessed, or window tax, they saw that bankruptcy and ruin of national credit must ensue. Were they to cut down

the army and navy, they felt that it would be to sacrifice to a vile clap-trap all the interests of the nation. Were they to abandon the Church to the Dissenters, eject the Bishops from the House of Lords, support vote by vallet or universal suffrage, they already felt "the pressure from without" more than they could withstand, and had little inclination voluntarily to add to its weight. They had already gone very far towards democracy, farther than their natural inclinations, opinions, or principles led them; and they would not advance beyond except under the compulsion of the direst necessity. The Whigs never intend to go all lengths, except they find that they cannot otherwise retain the reins of power.

We may be sure that there is little latitude of movement left to any Minister who still adheres to the Constitution. The concessions to the democratic power have been so ample that there is nothing left to surrender if any counterpoise is to be preserved. Practical amelioration is a slow, laborious, cautious process, demanding much labour and attention. It cannot be made for effect; it is not an *ad captandum* policy, and on that ground the Conservatives are as ready to act as the Whigs. The Movement press for sweeping changes, but sweeping changes would alter the form of government, and disorganize the frame of society. From this they recoil, and are therefore hemmed into a very confined space.

I have completed this portion of my subject in

reviewing the leading features of Lord Grey's Administration. It is not my purpose to enter into the details of the differences and disputes which led to its dissolution. The precise cause of Lord Grey's abrupt retirement is still involved in much ambiguity. The glimpses which we have obtained of the various intrigues only serve to bewilder us : but whatever may have been the secondary causes, I have no doubt that the primary one was the uneasiness created by the " pressure from without," and the dissatisfaction at their own waning popularity. In the Cabinet, as elsewhere, there was a Conservative and a Movement side. When their intelligencers and whippers-in brought them word that they were losing ground in the country, that their friends in the House of Commons were alienated, or were trembling for their seats—that their majority on this or that question was precarious—that some old and tried supporter was going to vote against them on such a motion, the arguments doubtless became warm, and the breach wide. The ultra-liberal portion became more urgent and impatient, and pressed with greater determination the introduction of some redeeming popular measure. Thus, differences of opinion which might have remained dormant, were brought into daily discussion ; opposite lines were taken, and a rupture became inevitable.

In both the changes which took place within a few weeks of each other, the secession of the Stanley party, and the retirement of Lord Grey, the

result was the same. The Conservative portion were foiled, the Movement triumphed. And let me add, that the more brilliant members in talent, the more independent in character, the more marked and distinguished in the public eye, were defeated by their inferiors in those respects. They were defeated, because from the moment they separated they stood almost alone, balanced between the Conservative and the Movement, while their late colleagues fell back upon the powerful support of the Movement party.

CHAPTER II.

Remarks on the Composition and Character of the first Reformed Parliament.

THE opening Session of the first Reformed Parliament naturally awakened the liveliest interest throughout the nation. Expectation was wound up to the highest pitch, and the public were watching with intense curiosity, the first apparent evidences of the great change which had been effected. Speculation was strained, and the imagination taxed to divine what would be the novelties which would signalize its meeting; who would be the fresh actors brought upon the political stage through these new channels to influence the destinies of their country.

In both were we disappointed; and it became apparent that even so powerful an agent as the Reform Bill would operate gradually, and not *per saltum*, upon those weighty masses of opinions, habits, and mingled interests which composed the British community.

There was a great proportion of members, and an unusual number of speakers possessed of a certain average fluency, but scarcely one has in any considerable degree arrested the public attention, or raised himself to notice either in or out of the House. The rank and file were changed, but the

leaders remained the same, and the alteration was principally apparent to the tellers of the divisions. The debate on the Address was almost a caricature upon the representative system. This preliminary form had always been the business of a single night, although as the general nature of the topics admitted of the introduction of every subject, it had ever been a tempting opportunity for maiden effusions. On this occasion, as if to show that the House thought its time of no value either to its own members or to the country, five nights were wasted in listening to fifty orators—five nights!—during which the important, the real essential business of the Session was wholly at a stand. And this was upon no question of moment, no trial of party strength, no national interest; it was for the most part a mere repetition of hustings' harangues, containing vague and wordy declamations, which never arrested for one moment the attention, or threw a new light upon the subject. I may be mistaken, but I always conceived that the last Parliament never recovered the position in the eyes of the country which it lost by this unlucky exhibition. Expectation had been so generally excited, hopes and fears so highly wrought, that there was in this deluge of frothy inanity a bathos which there was no rising from. It was like Louis Philippe's new expedient of dispersing an *emeute* by the play of a fire-engine. The House and the public were lost in this weary wilderness of words.

From this debate the character of the new House

might be gathered. The members freshly elected were for the most part, men who rather sought their seats as an end, than as a means,—who valued the individual distinction,—had no further object than to add to it the notoriety attending the publication of their names in the reports of speeches. They had, for the most part, no decided political aims, no strong enthusiasm, no bond of union, no habits of co-operation. They consisted of persons who had wanted to be Members of Parliament, and had obtained their desires ; some by local influence in the new boroughs, some by the profession of Radical or Whig principles. Having attained the summit of their hopes, and raised themselves into a position as new as it was elevated in their eyes, they were much more disposed to look about them, satisfy their curiosity, and enjoy their increased importance, than to plunge into the strife of parties, or kindle fresh flames of agitation. It has long been one of the elements of strength in the solid pyramid of our social order, that in those who have ascended even a little way from its base, the ardent wish to raise themselves still higher, supersedes all desire to overturn the fabric. The recruits to the Whig and Radical parties had, with the exception of the more ambitious aspirants after further successes, an internal persuasion that Reform, when it had gone the length of procuring them seats in the House of Commons, had advanced as far as the wants of society at the present period required. In time, no doubt, the passions which agitate all

popular assemblies would have infected them; they would have grouped themselves into parties, and been goaded on by their constituents; but at first, the new members hung loosely upon the House, and seemed collectively to have neither the ability, the address, or even the inclination to jostle the former occupants out of that lead which experience enabled them to take. These remarks do not apply the least to the Irish Repeal members, who entered the House a ready-formed party, in the highest state of organization and discipline, led by a skilful tactician, and manœuvring, or rather manœuvred, with consummate dexterity for the accomplishment of certain defined objects. But the new portion of the English and Scotch members, for the most part quietly occupied the back benches, and though they showed abundant disposition to speak, yet it was always in the track of others. There was no originality, no perceptible infusion of a new spirit into the House. On the contrary, the practical effect seemed to be a sort of dilution of the vigour and intellectual energy of the assembly. The substance of debate was still contained in the speeches of Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, Lord Althorp, Mr. Spring Rice, Mr. O'Connell, and the other leading members of former Parliaments. There was a double portion of side-scene accompaniments, long orations to which the House forgot to listen, and closely printed columns which the public omitted to peruse.

Arising partly from these, and partly from other

causes, there was a manifest decline in the influence and ascendancy which the House of Commons had long enjoyed over the public mind. The opening of a session had generally operated as a sedative upon popular irritation. The topics which had occupied its attention and inflamed its feelings during the recess were discussed, explanations given, and misunderstandings often rectified. People heard their respective opinions advocated ; measures attacked and defended by statesmen to whom they were accustomed to look up with respect,—the Peels and Cannings on the one side, the Broughams and Stanleys on the other ; they watched the controversy for a time, and then became content to leave it in the hands of the established organs. But now they looked upon their representatives as brought much nearer themselves. The voter from Bethnal Green or St. Giles's regarded the Member for Finsbury or for Westminster, like the feudal kings, but as *primus inter pares*. The new constituencies watched, often censured, and sometimes cashiered their representatives. The responsibility of the members was increased, but their dignity and influence were proportionably lowered, and the favourite exordium, " As the representative of one of the largest constituencies in this House," failed always to secure deference or attention to the orator. Men did not consider wordy discussions as entitled to sway their judgment, because they were uttered in St. Stephen's Chapel, when they did not know the names of the

orators, and when they had heard equally good speeches at the Mansion-House or the Town-Hall, the county-meeting or the race dinner. They still culled out the ministerial expositions on one side, and the replies of their distinguished opponents on the other ; but they ceased to look up to the assembly collectively which made so useless a display of superabundant mediocrity.

Yet let us do this first reformed House justice. If it did not exalt the character of deliberative assemblies, it was far from showing that dangerous and subversive spirit which was apprehended. It seconded the Conservative policy of Lord Grey's Administration,—it showed itself disposed to maintain the national credit and establishments,—it checked, by considerable majorities, the attempts to alter the Reform Bill.

The strength of the different parties consisted of upwards of 400 Whigs, about 130 Conservatives, and about 100 members of the Movement ; but it was difficult to draw the line accurately between the Whigs and the Radicals, who had been so lately associated together, and who had generally been returned upon the same interest.

The position of the Conservatives in this parliament was uncomfortable enough. Public opinion had run violently counter to them at the elections, and from 270, they had been reduced to 130. Nor was this numerical diminution their only loss. The effect of the new system was apparent. The Whigs, under the Administration of Pitt, had been

brought down still lower in point of numbers ; but all the leading men of their party continued to occupy their accustomed places. Their batteries in debate were as well served as ever, though their field operations showed the deficiencies of the muster-roll.

But with the Conservatives, it had been like the American rifle-practice, which picks off the officers. The most prominent speakers during the last two or three years, had been marked objects, and had been thrown out. The possessors of large landed property and great local influence had withstood the storm ; but several of the most distinguished men, and almost all the rising young politicians of that party had been excluded.

Nor did the position which they occupied, or the line of policy they were called upon to pursue, tend to console them under this loss both of the numbers and effective organs of their party. Their sense of duty to their country, their strong perception of the critical circumstances in which it was placed, forbade their offering any merely party opposition to the measures of Administration ; particularly when upon the whole they seemed as Conservative as its dependence upon the support of the popular party would admit. Yet they could scarcely be expected to afford it a very cordial assistance ; the more, as the Whigs seemed extremely desirous, while they took the help of their votes, to keep up the distinction and to fortify themselves as a *juste milieu*, by ascribing to them every kind of narrow and illiberal opinion.

It sometimes happened that many of the supporters of Government would absent themselves on unpopular questions, openly saying—"Oh, we know that the Conservatives will pull you through that job, and we had better not compromise ourselves with our constituents." Under such provocations it required some firmness of temper and principle not to be led into the tempting course of joining their forces to the Radicals and overthrowing their ancient opponents. Opportunities of this nature were not wanting, but the Whigs calculated justly that the sincerity and straightforward dealing of the Conservatives would not permit them to avail themselves of them. It is not difficult to conceive how much of constraint this forced neutrality,—this negative coalition,—this co-operation without confidence or amity, must have imposed. The Whigs were working, underhand, a Conservative game, which they were afraid to avow. They were met at every turn by the fierce hostility of Mr. O'Connell, and the opposition of the English Radicals. They were generally supported by the votes of the Conservatives ; yet they were constantly solicitous to impress upon the public the belief that the Conservatives were diametrically opposed to them, and that between the Radicals and themselves there were but partial differences. An example may make this somewhat entangled position of things more intelligible. The Whigs introduced in the Irish Coercion Bill the most arbitrary suspension of constitutional liberty which had

been resorted to for nearly a century. Half the enactments of this law were levelled at political agitation, and the other half was directed to the repression of the Whiteboy outrages. The keystone of the whole measure was the identity and connexion of the one with the other. It was with the greatest difficulty that many of the Conservatives were induced not to oppose this bill. They viewed with undisguised reluctance the grant of such enormous powers to men in whom they had no confidence. They lamented the necessity for so great an infraction both of political and personal liberty, and regarded it as the consequence of the culpable neglect of the legal and constitutional modes of repression during three years. They yielded, however, to the statements laid before them,—to the arguments of their own great leader,—to their sense of the urgency of the circumstances. They voted for the second reading of the bill. It went into committee. Mr. O'Connell attacked it with all his rare ability and legal acuteness. The Ministry seemed quite to cower before him, and conceded point after point, clause after clause. The Conservatives were indignant: they said—"You have come down with a bill elaborately prepared upon a case you have made out against the agitators in Ireland,—you have extorted from the House a reluctant consent to arm you with extraordinary powers; but it has consented, and it supports your bill by overflowing majorities. You ought not to have asked for more

than you felt the urgency of the case demanded; but do not now give way to the very power, to the very individual in his capacity of Member of this House,—against whom, in his character of agitator, you level such severe enactments. It is not just to the House,—to your own supporters,—to prevail with them to surrender a portion of the liberties of the people on the plea of necessity,—and then yourselves to invalidate that plea by spontaneously relinquishing your power to the very foe against whom you have required it. You weaken the moral force of your own law by so timid a proceeding. You impair the efficacy and terror of the weapon with which you have requested us to furnish you, by holding it in so nerveless a grasp, and by lowering its point before the mere aspect of your opponent's countenance.”

It was natural that such should be the sentiments of the Conservatives, and that with such feelings they should object to the modification of the penal clauses in committee. Yet this conduct, based on such grounds of common sense, was immediately caught at by the Government organs, to represent the Conservatives as the arbitrary defenders of every measure of extreme severity and oppression; and the Whigs, as standing between them and the Irish people, and mitigating the rigour and tyranny of their principles.

Another instance of the vacillating, unsteady course of ministerial policy, which had very important consequences, will still further elucidate

this position of the Conservatives. Lord Grey had declared that the grievances arising out of the collection of tithes should be remedied in Ireland ; but that till removed by Act of Parliament, obedience to the existing laws must be enforced. On the faith of this declaration, the clergy very generally endeavoured to obtain their legal rights, and were beginning, in almost every quarter of the country, to triumph over the combination against them. In some instances disturbances arose, and as usual in that country, the civil power applied for the protection of a military force. This subject was brought before the House by some of the Irish repeal members, when, to the universal astonishment of every one, Lord Althorp gave an assurance on the part of Government, that the assistance of the military should not be afforded in cases of resistance to tithe. Now, to comprehend the force of this declaration, we must be aware, that in the unhappy circumstances of Ireland, the civil power leans for protection in every thing upon the aid of the military. Every legal process is executed either by the immediate assistance of the military, or by the knowledge that it could be readily obtained. The principle is the same as in England, where a forcible resistance to any legal demand would be suppressed, if necessary, by the aid of the military power ; but in England it is dormant, whereas in Ireland it is in constant and active operation. If a minister were to proclaim that no military aid would be afforded in the execution of any

process for the recovery of rent, there would be no rent;—if he said that it should not be given for the collection of King's taxes, there would be no taxes. In every thing the civil power is sustained by the visible support of the armed force. Lord Althorp's declaration, therefore, however meant, operated as a sentence of outlawry against tithe property; it took away from it the protection enjoyed by every other description of property, it assured impunity to its assailants. From that hour the collection of tithes became impossible.

These examples may serve to explain how impossible it was for the Conservatives to concede entire confidence, or any cordial approbation to a Government exhibiting so much infirmity of purpose, and moving at different times in such contrary directions. Yet, upon the whole, they desired the continuance of Lord Grey's Administration. They appreciated the difficulty of withstanding the farther encroachments of the democratic power. They were persuaded that several members of that Cabinet might be relied upon for the sincerity of their endeavours to sustain the fabric of the Church and of the Monarchy against its attacks. They saw that this portion required every support, both against the "pressure from without," and against their own colleagues. They thought that Ministry which had so considerable a claim upon the gratitude even of the most extreme Radicals, was most favourably circumstanced for curbing and soothing their dangerous violence, and

for playing the nice game of resistance to boundless innovation.

They therefore abstained from every species of party manœuvre ; they never provoked debates or divisions, except when the assertion of their consistency imperatively required it ;—they sought no specious pretext to vote in conjunction with the Radicals,—the leaders in the House of Peers forbore to use their majority against the vital measures of the Administration ;—they submitted to the inconveniences of their position,—they smothered personal and party resentments,—they bore misrepresentation and obloquy,—they allowed themselves with their eyes open, to be instruments in the hands of their ancient opponents,—they felt and believed that the best interests of their country required that they should afford to their rivals a fair trial, and with true, simple, unostentatious patriotism they gave them the fairest and the fullest one.

A description of the feelings and conduct of the party at this period which should omit all mention of the leader, who was the regulating spirit of the whole, would be imperfect indeed. The national interest, awakened by his more recent and splendid exertions at the head of his short-lived administration, may withdraw attention from this less marked period of his career. The future may have in store for him a long, brilliant, and successful course, which may throw into deeper shade this brief time of less prosperous fortune. Yet the biographer of

the life of Sir Robert Peel will not pass with a hasty step over this portion of his political existence. It was no common trial for the former leader of the House of Commons to look round upon the thin train of dejected followers, from whose front ranks so many of his best supporters, of his most confidential friends, and most efficient coadjutors in debate, had disappeared. It was some provocation even to find himself jostled from that place which the prescriptive courtesies of other times would have spontaneously yielded to him, by the rude and novel intrusion of a hostile faction.

It was no mean test of the highest order of parliamentary ability thus, almost alone and unaided, under circumstances calculated to depress, in the presence of triumphant and exulting opponents, to command an attention as profound, to extort a personal deference as complete as had ever been accorded to his brightest fortunes. There was dignity of character and intellectual energy in this proud self-assertion against so strong an adverse current. That was no doubtful superiority, which extracted the materials of increased personal considerations from the very absence of adventitious support.

The first and most arduous step was to establish an ascendancy in the new House equal to that which he had enjoyed in the old. Nor did it require less of statesmanlike ability and comprehensiveness of mind to shape his course, when that position was attained according to the dictates of the policy which I have previously described. His

detractors are always desirous of representing him as a mere skilful parliamentary tactician, whose power only consists in his readiness in debate and practical knowledge of the House of Commons. Yet during this whole period the leading characteristic of his conduct was its simplicity, its singleness, its rejection of every species of party manoeuvre.

Of the Whig recruits in the new Parliament my opportunities of observation were not very close or frequent. We sat in a different part of the House, and had little communication. There is no position from which a young member has more difficulty in bringing himself into notice than in the back rows of the ministerial side. All the prominent parts were already filled by old Whigs, in possession either of office or of an established claim on the ear of the House. They did not want inexperienced advocates, they desired only votes. An injudicious assailant exposes his coadjutors to little risk. If his shaft misses its mark, it does not recoil upon his neighbours. But on the ministerial side, which is always the defensive, some mistaken or imprudent friend may greatly embarrass the argument, and lead the Minister into some disadvantageous position. No Government is very desirous of encouraging such efforts, and there were therefore fewer public occasions of remarking the temper and calibre of the new members on the Whig side. From what I could observe they struck me as a difficult body to manage. They

generally owed their seats to local influence in some of the new boroughs, and had a little of that over-estimation of their own consequence which local importance inspires. They were touchy on the point of attention, and disposed to be jealous of the more aristocratic Whigs and of the official men. They had many affinities with the Radicals, and had been returned by the votes of a large portion of the Radical supporters. While they risked much by ranging themselves with the Ministry on any unpopular measure, they had an easy and convenient bridge over to the Radical side, whenever they felt inclined to walk that way. It is wonderful, upon the whole, how well these men adhered to Lord Grey; but their support was perhaps felt to be precarious, and much of the vacillation of the Government may probably be owing to a consciousness of its hollowness.

The Radical, or Movement party, standing as they did in a completely new position, were the real objects of curiosity and interest. It was sufficiently obvious, that if sweeping changes were to take place in our political and social system, it was through their agency that they would be effected. Within the walls of the House of Commons their appearance even was still a novelty. A few names had always been familiar to our ears, as those of members who were considered to go beyond the limits of the Whig code in their approximation towards the spirit of democracy. Sir Francis Burdett, Sir J. Hobhouse, the present Lord Radnor,

perhaps Mr. Hume, may be adduced as examples. But neither in the numbers, nor in any systematic union or line of conduct, could they be deemed a separate party. They were merely Whigs moving in somewhat an erratic course, or at most the faint germ of the new power.

The Movement might first be recognized as forming a separate body in the House after the accession of the Whigs to office. Mr. Hume, Mr. Warburton, and some other English members, together with Mr. O'Connell and his friends, remained upon the opposition side of the House, and assumed an attitude of doubtful neutrality*. Their numbers were much increased by the elections on the Reform question in April, 1831, and through all that Parliament they separated themselves from the Whigs, sitting on the Opposition benches, and carefully keeping up a distinction. But this was more apparent in their demeanour in the House, than in either their votes or speeches, for the Reform Bill was, during its progress, the bond of a close union with Government. They supported Lord Althorp as steadily as if they had had themselves seats in the Cabinet. If on one or two questions, such as the Russian Dutch Loan, they declared against them, they took care so to manage their opposition as not seriously to embarrass them.

But no sooner was the Reform Bill passed, no sooner was this great object of their mutual efforts

* I mean Mr. Hume and the English. There was nothing doubtful in Mr. O'Connell's hostility to the Whigs at this time.

accomplished, than, at the very opening of the Session, on the first day even, without waiting for any exposition of the future policy of the Government, without any gradual estrangement springing out of differences arising in the progress of affairs, they at once occupied the front ranks of opposition, and commenced a vigorous, open, avowed course of hostility. They seemed, as plainly as actions could speak, to say—"The Reform Bill was our sole and temporary link of union—that is disposed of. Our interests and our objects henceforth are opposed the one to the other. You made use of the power that Bill has given you for your purposes; we intend to wrest it from you, and to convert it to ours. We have now arrived at that adult age when we think that we are old enough and strong enough to set up for ourselves."

It cannot be too plainly impressed upon the public mind, that the real effective opposition to Lord Grey's Administration in 1833 and 1834, was that of the Radicals, and not of the Conservatives. Between the latter and the Government there was old political rivalry—there was strong recent irritation—there was absence of confidence; but there was not systematic opposition to the measures they were then pursuing.

We have traced the Movement party through three stages. In the Parliament of 1830 it consisted of a knot of individuals; in the Parliament which carried the Reform Bill it embraced a considerable body, keeping aloof from the Ministry,

but affording it their effective and almost uniform support. In the first Reformed Parliament it numbered about 100 members, who unfurled the standard of opposition to the Ministry, and commenced the most active warfare against their government. It may be added that, little adequate as their numerical strength within the walls of the House of Commons might appear to the task, yet, aided by its internal divisions, and by the assistance they derived from the democratic influence without, they succeeded in driving a wedge into that Cabinet, which split it to pieces. Whatever success may have attended their exertions, it seemed to be attained without their struggles eliciting the display of any very shining talents. There was abundant encouragement for all the more ardent and adventurous spirits to flock to their ranks. Their side was evidently the rising one. Its places of distinction were as yet unoccupied. Their designation was no longer a nickname associated with the ideas of the Rotunda and Orator Hunt's blacking van. The weight they had acquired in the scale, and the prospect of power, had given respectability to the term of Radical. And yet, with all these inducements, with so fair a field, no new candidate appeared qualified for the post of leader of the English Movement.

It is a favourite theory with political philosophers, and one which is entitled to consideration, that the occasion creates the man—that as, if a

gentleman wants a butler or a bailiff, he advertises for one and finds him : so that, when society and the circumstances of the times require a Cromwell or a Napoleon, the Cromwell or Napoleon is forthcoming. If this be true, certainly English society had no need just then of a Radical statesman, for no democratic Pitt or Fox started forth, a ready-made head of the Movement. Mr. O'Connell was the only person qualified, by his talents for debate and his general ability, to perform the part ; but the English members were reluctant to enrol themselves in the list of his followers, and he restricted himself to his peculiar province. Had the metropolitan boroughs or the Scotch constituencies been able to lay their hand upon a Mirabeau, I do not know where he might have carried us ; but no such Coryphæus appeared, and the chords which might have responded to his touch remained mute.

Had our Radicals possessed, indeed, a tithe of the real grievances to expatiate upon which inflamed the passions, or half the shadowy hopes to hold out which intoxicated the imaginations, of the members of the Constituent Assembly, such subjects might have kindled the latent flame of eloquence within them, and pointed out the road to the sympathies and hearts of their audience. But they found enthusiasm somewhat exhausted, and they had but factitious topics on which to appeal to it. It was rather too early to recommence the cry for the ballot, when people had not yet had breathing time from the agitation of the Reform

Bill. It was in vain that they assailed newspaper stamps under the invidious appellation of taxes upon knowledge. Such questions might serve as an exercise for party discussions, but could hardly be expected to form a lever by which to move the popular masses. It must be something which plays upon either their interests, their passions, or their sympathies, much more strongly than speculative subjects of this nature, which can communicate an electric impulse to these vast bodies. The case of the Dorsetshire labourers, if it could have found an English O'Connell to handle it, and to work upon the feelings by a few touches of simple pathos, and some descriptions in the style of Crabbe, would have been worth more to a thorough-going Radical than fifty such motions as the knowledge-tax repeal.

It may be that what the Movement party had gained in the respectability of its more prominent supporters, it had lost in the power derived from congeniality of feeling and active sympathy with the masses without, who are the sources of its strength. Its new advocates were either too much of speculative theorists, or young men whose habits and education identified them, perhaps in spite of themselves, with the upper classes, and who took up the cause of Radicalism a little from the desire of acquiring personal distinction by a new and short path. That party which enumerated among its adherents the varied information of Mr. Warburton, the ingenious philosophy of Mr. Grote, or

the high literary talent of Mr. E. Lytton Bulwer, could not be stigmatized with coarseness or vulgarity. But if it was less displeasing in these respects to the fastidious, it was deficient in the enthusiasm, in the impetuosity which would have developed its full power, in vigour and earnestness of purpose. A man armed with a club may put himself into all the graceful positions of a fencing-master, but if he desires to make the most of his weapon, he must grasp it in both hands, and lay about him without regard to rule.

The absence of any master spirit was felt in the want of concert in all their operations. They were not confederated together like the old parties. They had none of the *esprit de corps* of the Whigs. They had none of the social and private links by which that party is bound together. See the Russells and Cavendishes, the Greys, the Lambtons, the Ponsonbys, the Foxes, the Lambas, the Lansdowns, &c., how they are all interlaced together by ancient recollections, by early friendships, by habitual intercourse, by family alliances; and compare them with the Movement leaders, probably very recently strangers to each other, and perhaps having now no other acquaintance together than that of the House of Commons. Time is required to discipline a party as well as an army, and the want of organization is felt as much in one as in the other. I had an impression that the parliamentary Movement party were altogether disappointed at the little effect they at first produced within its

walls. They had calculated upon the Reform Bill bringing them a much larger and more immediate accession of importance. They conceived that the Conservative party were virtually extinguished, and that the overthrow of the Whigs was an easy achievement. Events did not correspond with their anticipations. Their exertions did little to assist them. If it had not been for Mr. O'Connell and his Irish questions, they would have lost almost all hold of public attention. And yet how much has the strength of this party been increased! It now numbers from 160 to 170 members, and if it is not in office it holds the fate of a weak Ministry at its disposal.

All this, however, has been accomplished *for* the parliamentary party, and not *by* them. The power of the press and the instincts of the democracy have shoved these 160 members into the House, but they seem to have arrived there merely because they were nearest the door when it was opened. The Movement party in England have as yet no ostensible leader, no organ possessed of real influence among them, or capable of wielding or directing their forces. Mutual necessity has again forced a union with the portion of the late Whig party approximating nearest to themselves, and they must be contented to revert to their former course, and to satisfy themselves with constraining their late opponents to work out their purposes.

At a crisis like this the passing events monopo-

lize so completely our attention,—the occurrences of each day arrest so strongly our faculties of observation,—that it is a painful effort to withdraw our eyes even for a moment from the scene before us. However recent may be the period, however intimate the connexion with the present, we turn our eyes backwards with impatient reluctance, and revert to watch the moving drama before us with renewed eagerness. Retrospective views are not congenial to a moment of action and intense excitement. We long so much to witness the development of the future, that we have not time to study the past. I have with difficulty perhaps induced my readers to follow me through the preceding review of the last three years. I feel relieved myself at having again overtaken the march of events. Yet an explanation of my views required a reference to the preceding time.

It is the error of actors in great events to attribute results exclusively to those secondary causes which are the obvious agents, and, to disregard or fail to perceive those more general influences and tendencies, of which immediate causes are but the subordinate instruments. Thus the Whigs will assail Lord Stanley with the charge of having broken up the party, or will lament the divisions produced by the private communications with Mr. O'Connell, or will assail the Conservatives as the instigators of some underhand court intrigue in November, 1834, or will discuss the Appropriation Clause in Lord John Russell's Tithe Bill, as if that

were the whole question ; but they will not throw aside their party spectacles to look at things with the naked eye of impartiality and truth.

I have retraced the course of transactions during the latter part of Lord Grey's Administration, that I might found upon that statement a brief summary of my deductions from them, which I shall endeavour, by way of conclusion to this chapter, to embody in a few plain propositions,—

1st. That the Reform Bill effected so great a change in the practical balance of our Constitution, introduced so many new influences, altered so entirely the whole face of our domestic policy, that an entire remodelling of parties was the necessary consequence.

2ndly. That it appeared to me inevitable that the strong tendency would be, from the passing of that measure, to form two great parties ; the one comprehending all those attached to the English Constitution with its three branches—its Monarchy, its vigorous though responsible Executive, its hereditary and independent House of Lords, and its Established Church connected with the State ; the other consisting of all those desirous of wielding the great and increased power of the Democracy against these institutions, and pushing their encroachments till they should have achieved its uncontrolled ascendancy.

3rdly. That the immense importance of the questions at issue, and the extensive nature of the interests at stake, must enlist the whole Empire in the

struggle, and enrol them under the banners of one or the other of these ; and also that it must become, from a warfare of parties in politics, a warfare of classes in the community.

4thly. That the old political parties must sooner or later be entirely broken up, under the influence of such novel and powerful agents,—that the ground which they occupied, the objects they contended for, the interests which actuated them, being all completely altered, the mere cohesiveness of party attachment could not long continue to unite them, and that the old Whig and Tory must be finally merged in the more comprehensive terms of Conservative and Movement, or Radical.

5thly. That this consummation has already taken place. The breaking up of Lord Grey's Cabinet, and the two successive triumphs of the Movement section of it, decided the question.

From that time the Conservatives lost all hope of the policy of resistance being effectively maintained by the Whig Ministry. They had watched the course of the experiment to the end, and they wisely resumed the energetic opposition to Lord Melbourne, which, during its progress, they had suspended towards Lord Grey.

The dismissal of the Melbourne Ministry followed. I always deplored it as a premature and injudicious step ; yet it has had many good results ; it has shaken things into their natural places ; it has removed the intervening rubbish, and shown us more clearly the ground we stand on. The

Whigs have it no longer in their power to play a false and hollow game, manœuvring between the two other parties. They are forced to show their colours and declare their purposes. There was no advantage in that delusive phantom of Whig strength, behind which the Radicals masked their approaches. It is far better that there should be a real and avowed union with the Movement, than a delusive and mock distinction.

The Whigs boast that the Reform Bill subverted Toryism. I believe them; but I assert that it equally undermined Whiggism. The present Ministers may call themselves by what fanciful soubriquet they please. Their supporters may cry—"Oh, here is Lord Melbourne and the Marquis of Lansdown, surely they cannot be called Radicals!" We have nothing to do with the private opinions or secret inclinations of these noblemen; but if we see their government in the Lower House strictly united with the Movement party, and subsisting but by its support, we have a right to consider them as identified together. The argument of their advocates, that they are not to be censured, because, without any agreement or alliance, their measures happen to meet with the support of O'Connell and the English and Scotch Radicals, is as weak as it is disingenuous. It is not because their measures happen to meet with the approbation of these parties,—it is not because a fortuitous concurrence of opinion is formed between them,—that we proclaim our distrust.

It is because they depend for the passing of those measures, and for their own existence, upon that concurrence and support; and that where an absolute dependence is manifest, we are not credulous enough to believe that it does not imply constraint and subserviency. It is at best a compromise, in which the most violent portion consent, not to the relinquishment, but to the postponement of their extreme objects, for the sake of obtaining the co-operation of the less daring, in securing the more immediate ones. But such a compromise is, inevitably, to the sole ultimate advantage of the Movement party; the essence of whose policy it is to pursue their system of encroachment, step by step, to take all instalments, and who calculate that they are always compensated for the desertion of any over-scrupulous or timid confederate in any future stage, by the additional power derived from the object gained through his assistance. I am therefore fully borne out in my conclusion, that the practical statesman, looking to results, will admit of no distinction between the Ministerial party and their Movement allies; and that whatever may be the individual differences or minor shades of opinion, we have already arrived at the point when there exists but one broad marked line of demarcation—that between the Conservative and the Radical.

CHAPTER III.

On the Conservative Party.

It has been an opinion of long standing with me, and one which formed the basis of many of the observations which I have now, and at a former time, offered to the public, that the Whigs, who were fond of charging upon their adversaries (the Tories) blindness, narrow-mindedness, and an ignorance of the spirit of the age, were themselves especially liable to these imputations.

A century, nay half a century ago, Whigs and Tories were the only known bodies in the political sphere; and it appears to me that, practically, the Whigs have always acted as if such continued to be the case. At least, they have always seemed to regard all other modifications of political parties and opinions as subordinate to these divisions, and as finally reducible into the one or the other of these classes. This is exemplified daily in the descriptions with which their organs favour us of the Conservative party,—descriptions which seem to be in strict accordance with the sentiments and opinions of the leaders and public men, whenever an opportunity of declaring them presents itself.

According to them, the term Conservative is but a new appellation, a thin disguise, under which old

Toryism seeks to veil itself, and disembarass itself of an accumulated load of unpopularity, like the *alias* of a well-known offender at the Old Bailey. And they, like some experienced Alley or Adolphus, are constantly on the watch to expose this subterfuge, and to prove the identity of the criminal. Thus they always address the mighty Conservative body in this empire, with its high talents, its imposing numbers, its warm attachment to our national institutions, precisely as if it was a little, soured, disappointed band of ex-placemen. They impute to it every narrow prejudice, an obstinate adherence to every antiquated abuse, a stupid dullness of perception to all the wants, desires, and sentiments which actuate a community of advanced civilization and growing intelligence.

So much for our intellectual character : our moral is not more favourably drawn. We are depicted as inconceivably corrupt, interested, wily, and treacherous. We are supposed to be engaged in an artful and insidious conspiracy against the people. We are conceived to have established at the Carlton Club a focus of dark intrigue, where every machination against the nation is carried on. We are supposed to consist of a certain proportion of dogged, incurable blockheads, who are tools in the hands of another section of designing knaves. The motive of this active part of the body is universally assumed to be the love of place, and the inclination, as it is usually termed, to prey upon

the spoils of the people. It is considered indisputable that we are a minority, and a small one ; yet we are still esteemed formidable from our art and our organization. Our character being thus assigned to us, every act is construed according to it.

Do we support a ministerial bill of improvement in any department, our co-operation is represented as an artful and secretly reluctant submission to a power which we would have resisted, had we felt resistance practicable. Do we, on principle, sustain the Minister in some collision with the popular party, as the Coercion Bill, the Malt and Window Taxes, or the Pension List, our conduct is ascribed to so innate a love for arbitrary power, profuse extravagance, and corruption, that we cannot for our souls resist the temptation of voting in favour of them, even when the profit is reaped by our opponents. Does a Conservative Ministry succeed for a brief interval to office, and does its able leader obtain the opportunity of at least submitting to the country a series of well-digested practical measures, removing all real and substantial causes of complaint upon most of the subjects which have agitated the public mind, he is met by another cry,—It is a flagrant departure from all the principles of himself and his party,—it is an ungenerous attempt to obtain office by adopting all the policy of his adversaries which he had opposed,—it is a gross inconsistency on the part of the Conservatives,—it is a tissue of artful and insidious

clap-traps. All these charges, all these arguments, rest upon a party-colouring and perversion of the acts of the Old Tory Governments, and still more upon the false assumption that Conservative and Tory are synonymous terms, and that all the qualities and characteristics which the popular orators, in their kindness and partiality, apply to the latter, are equally suitable to the former.

No period of our history from the Revolution of 1688 was so remarkably distinguished by the absence of party spirit as the reign of George IV. Among the great body of the educated classes of this country, a total indifference to party designations prevailed. Let any one, out of those limited circles in which politics are a pursuit and a profession, have proposed the question to any number of individuals in the year 1825—"Are you a Whig or a Tory?" Let this inquiry have been made of the members of the learned and liberal professions, of literary men, of the gentry, and of the intelligent and educated portion of the middle ranks. The same answer would have been returned by an immense majority—"We are neither; we form our own judgment on events—we are indifferent to both; we watch the conduct of each, but espouse neither side." Let the question now be asked in any part of the country, however remote, of any persons however removed from the atmosphere of politics, whether they are Conservatives or (as they are pleased to term themselves exclusively) Reformers; and their answers will testify that the

whole nation is split into two great opposing parties, ranged against each other with determined hostility, and contending for mighty interests. Is it then that the Tory party have made such numberless proselytes? Do the Whigs mean to admit that their ancient adversaries have suddenly, in their old age, obtained so important an accession of strength, that Toryism has become epidemic? Are the numerous popular constituencies who, at the last general election, returned a majority of English members to support Sir Robert Peel composed of Tories alone? Or is it not rather that, the field of controversy being enlarged, the principles involved infinitely more comprehensive, the interests affected incalculably more extended, a new name is required to designate a party composed of such new materials? Was it ever a question between Whig and Tory, whether the House of Lords should be elected by household suffrage—whether the Bishops should be deprived of their seats in it—whether vote by ballot should be established—whether the Church of Ireland should be abolished? And may not thousands of intelligent Englishmen, who never esteemed themselves followers of a party, whose opinions differed widely from those of the Tories, be roused into exertion, and organize themselves into the phalanx of a party, when they can perceive a real danger of such doctrines being speedily acted upon. Is it an irrational ground of objection to a Ministry, that, if not themselves the advocates of these revo-

lutionary changes, they yet rely upon the indispensable support of men whose whole object it is to accomplish them, and who avow that they give that support precisely because they conceive it is the best means of promoting such views?

I have said that the educated classes ten years ago were extremely indifferent to party, but I would not be supposed to allow that they were apathetic or careless respecting public affairs. Never did the best informed part of the British public exercise a calmer, a more impartial, or a more attentive judgment upon the conduct of statesmen, and the course of events, than at this period—never was the desire for social amelioration and practical improvement more ardent. But in this course of improvement, which all were desirous to tread, certain positions were established as points of departure—certain axioms were taken for granted as already fully demonstrated by time and experience. These were,—the excellence of the British Constitution, and its superiority as a form of free government to any more purely democratic system;—the inexpediency of legislating upon abstract principles, or of attempting to remodel society upon a theoretical basis;—the necessity of recognizing stability as the great basis of improvement;—the advantage of cultivating and cherishing national attachments, patriotic feelings, regard and veneration for ancient usages, habits, and institutions, which knit together political society, as the natural, tender, and domestic affections unite private life.

The French Revolution had made the most profound impression upon the educated public in England. In the early history of that memorable event, they read the proof of the extreme of folly, madness, guilt, and misery in which a nation may be involved by shaking off all the restraints of law, established order, and religion. They witnessed the accumulated wretchedness which follows a wild war of democracy against every species of superiority which can excite its jealousy or cupidity. Such was the frightful yet faithful picture with which their early childhood had been familiar. Since the peace they had enjoyed and availed themselves of the facilities of forming an extensive and intimate acquaintance with the present state of France. The lesson, if less striking and terrible to the imagination than that of the Reign of Terror, was even more instructive. They saw the country, after a lapse of years, over which so desolating a storm had passed, and they beheld evidence of the lasting ravages it had left—of the difficulty of reconstructing the fabric of a society which had been shattered by so fearful a convulsion. They found a nation active, energetic, spirited, independent, abounding in civilization and intelligence. They perceived a great deal of probity and good feeling among all classes, particularly the middle ranks. They observed an ardent desire for liberty, and a great respect for social order. They were satisfied that bitter experience had left engraven upon the hearts of the people a profound horror of

the atrocities which had stained the first Revolution. Yet, with all these admirable materials, they were met at every turn with proof of the almost impossibility of framing any model of constitutional liberty, which should have the least durability, in the absence of all those great landmarks which the first Revolution had entirely swept away. Without any religious establishment possessing a hold over the minds of the people—without any distinctions of rank—without any local influence—without any masses of property,—society presented a dead level, offering no resistance to the inundations of popular violence on the one side, or the more steady encroachments of power on the other.

Such was the spectacle which France offered to the examination of the large proportion of our countrymen who had the opportunity of studying her present condition. Their impressions tended powerfully to confirm us in that repugnance to organic changes, to extensive innovation, which tempered the desire for practical amelioration.

I have always thought that, in answer to the sophistries of those who so perpetually confound innovation and improvement, there is a very natural and obvious view of the subject, which has not been frequently brought forward. It is common to say that innovation is not improvement; but we may carry out the position farther, and assert that innovation is always in its nature opposed to improvement; that its single tendency is always to suspend,

often to retard it, and that it must be accompanied by great countervailing advantages, to overbalance this inclination.

Innovation—I mean the substitution of a new and untried system for an old one—must generally be advocated, upon the ground that we have been long in error,—that we have made many steps in a false direction, that we have blindly wasted and misapplied our time and efforts. Should the error be proved, it must be corrected; when we are convinced that our course is a mistaken one, we must retrace our path, but the necessity is dispiriting. The very conviction that we have been deceived when we believed that we were right; the very proof of our fallibility, is of itself a discouragement to attempts in a new track. We feel that we have wasted time and power, that we were buoyed up by a delusive belief that we were advancing; and we have at last to learn that we have lost our labour. We have been wrong, therefore we may be wrong again. What better security have we now than we had before? The improvement obtained by the mere rectification of error, is of a negative and unsatisfactory nature. Substantial improvement, real progress, is gained by adding truth to truth, and building on the foundation which is already laid. If the foundation should prove unsound, or the plan defective, all may have to be begun again; but we do not commonly call this advancing. Apply this reasoning to some other science than politics. Let us take the discoveries

of Newton for example, which shed undying glory on the country which gave him birth, and which raise human nature itself to a higher scale in the creation, to a more intimate knowledge of the scheme and the attributes of its mighty Author. When by the great law of gravity, the immortal philosopher explained all the wonderful mechanism of planetary motion, certain slight irregularities caught his attention, trifling vacillations which he was unable to account for upon his system, and which he was disposed to consider as exceptions attributable to the little caprices of nature.

The later observations of the eminent French mathematicians, and their use of new and refined methods of calculation, proved those apparent deviations to be strict results of an extended application of his principles. They discovered that these disturbances, as they are called, were the effects of the reciprocal action of the gravity of the different planetary bodies upon each other, and farther, that by a beautiful nicety in the adjustment, they balanced each other, so as never to introduce any permanent irregularity into the system. Here, then, is progress, wholesome, sound; indisputable progress—a principle satisfactorily explaining new facts, and the new facts corroborating the truth of the principle. Suppose now that we had found in La Place or La Grange a radical reformer in astronomical science—that their ingenuity had detected a flaw in the reasoning of the *Principia*—that the immortal discoveries of Newton had been

reduced to the level of the whirlpools of Des Cartes, or any other fanciful and exploded theory, would this have been advance? How we should have regretted the overthrow of that noble and lucid system—how we should have mourned that our mental vision, which had been extended almost to embrace infinity, should have again been contracted to a narrow span! How painfully and reluctantly should we have surrendered the high and pure thoughts, the splendid prospect of the economy of the universe, which this proudest achievement of human intellect had spread before us! and with what a cold scepticism as to the reality of truth in anything—with what a mortified sense of the fallibility of our powers should we have recalled our absolute belief in a theory, which, while it enables the imagination to wing its loftiest flight, rests upon reason's firmest basis.

The educated classes in England, ten years ago, joined to a real liberality of political opinion an intimate belief of the superiority and excellence of our constitution. Upon that foundation they were desirous to build all improvements. They considered that time, experience, comparison with other nations, had established its intrinsic merits. They were convinced that prescription, usage, the mutual adaptation of laws to a state of society, and of a state of society to its laws, had formed it to fit and suit the peculiar habits of the nation. They rejected all those doctrines which owed their origin to the French Revolution, which were deduced

from the fanciful hypotheses of a social contract, natural rights, and the like. They thought that their fallacy was easily to be shown, and that their pernicious tendency had been most unequivocally displayed. They felt pride in, and attachment to, the free monarchy under which they were born : they would have defended the popular parts of it with ardour against the encroachment of arbitrary power—they were prepared with equal firmness to guard the monarchy and the peerage against the assaults of democracy, and with a tolerant yet a devoted zeal to uphold the Altar and the Throne. They at the same time led, they did not tamely follow, the progressive advance of their age and nation. Every enlarged view of political economy, every judicious mode of retrenchment, every practical reform, found in the great body of the educated and enlightened gentry of this country zealous and able advocates.

It is this body, so little imbued with prejudice, so penetrated with a generous love of what, in its real and not in its cant acceptation, I call liberality of political opinion, so warmly attached to our English Constitution, which has formed the nucleus of the Conservative party.

I have sometimes heard it asked, What is a Conservative—what does the word mean? I think that I can give a short and clear definition. A Conservative is a man attached upon principle to the English Constitution, to the Established Church, to our mixed institutions. Well, but so is, or at

least so was, a Whig of the old school. There is another characteristic—a Conservative is one who, having this loyalty to the Constitution, believes it is threatened with subversion by the encroachments of democracy, and is prepared to defend it against that danger. The Conservative party, therefore, includes all those shades and degrees of political opinion, from the disciple of moderate Whig principles to the most devoted champion of ancient usages, who agree in these two points—attachment to King, Lords, Commons, Church, and State, and a belief that there is a pressing danger of these institutions being overborne by the weight of the Democracy.

I have cited the two extremes embraced by the Conservative party, but it takes its prevailing colour from the bulk of the main body, who have been formed from the materials I have described, and who adhere to the opinions they have always maintained. When, therefore, all the charges of bigotry and selfishness, which I have repeated in the beginning of this chapter, are preferred against us, we repel them as originating in the grossest misconception, or the most wilful perversion of the truth. We are no reluctant, tardy, insincere converts to the cause of practical reform—we do not yield a constrained and interested acquiescence to an overpowering necessity. We are not inconsistent with ourselves. The great body of the Conservatives in the empire would have supported as heartily all Sir Robert Peel's proposed measures

of last session ten years ago as they would now. We are not inconsistent, and we are in a position which enables us to receive recruits, who are guilty of no inconsistency in coming to us. Wherever the Ministry or the Movement enter upon a new stage of their progress—wherever, one object having been accomplished, they start a new game—wherever they direct their engines against some institution which they had hitherto spared, or assail openly some point which they had only before covertly attacked,—a portion of their adherents are justified in breaking away from them. They who are perpetually taking fresh strides in a new and hazardous path have no right to brand those of their followers who pause as deserters, unless they are prepared to assert that fidelity to party is a more imperative duty than attachment to principle.

There is another very obvious reason why, without the slightest inconsistency, a numerous class of the Conservative party may be disposed to tread the path of practical reform with a bolder step than heretofore. Before the Bill of 1832 passed, before that great question was decided, it was a natural, a prudent, and a defensible policy in many, to tolerate certain defects, to acquiesce in imperfections to a certain limited extent, rather than to run the risk of disturbing a complicated system, or of introducing a spirit of change, which might sweep away the excellencies as well as the abuses. But after the Reform Bill had passed, this motive

no longer existed,—the career of innovation was begun, and all that remained was to guide it in a proper direction.

I have, perhaps, taken unnecessary pains to vindicate the Conservative party from the aspersions cast upon them by the virulence of party vituperation. It is evident, even to the least inquiring, that their numbers and property entitle their sentiments to the respect which is due to the opinions of an important division of the community. The *Edinburgh Review*, even in a late article, discussing the difficulties of Reform in the House of Lords, remarks that the property of the country is Conservative, and that a House of Lords elected by a constituency with a qualification of 500*l.* a-year and upwards, would be far more hostile to the Movement than the present one. So this faction consists of the vast majority of persons of property, beginning with those of 500*l.* a-year. To stigmatize them as illiberal, selfish, sacrificing the many to the few, is to assert that such is the character of the most highly educated classes; since it will hardly be disputed that this term applies to that portion of society possessing a competence of 500*l.* a-year and upwards.

It is not in the teeth of an admission like this, made by their own most accredited organ, that such paradoxes can be maintained. The numbers, the influence, the property enlisted in the support of the Conservative cause, can require no proof, except to those who shut their eyes to the evidence

of their own senses. Conservatism is, in fact, the embodied resistance of the most strongly constituted, of the most firmly compacted, social and political system that ever existed upon earth, to the action of the most powerful agent of decomposition that can be applied to human institutions. The duration and the event of the struggle are questions which no foresight can solve; but it must be blindness indeed which could fail to see the magnitude of the conflicting interests.

Discarding, therefore, the contracted views and petty diatribes of the party journalists—brushing aside their hackneyed repetitions of Whig and Tory controversies, let us endeavour to raise ourselves to the level of circumstances, and measure, if we can, the mighty questions which are agitated, and the vast sections of the community which are arrayed against each other.

We see that the events of the last three years have been evidently tending to make these great natural divisions stronger and more apparent. We trace the crumbling away of party confederacies, and we observe the re-solution of their component parts into one or other of the great national divisions into which the empire is split. We perceive that there are no longer subtle and ingenious distinctions between the spirit and the letter of the Constitution,—no longer plausible professions of attachment to its form and its essence, and of desires bounded to the task of removing the corruptions which time has accumulated and super-

added to its original structure. Two of the principal essential portions of that Constitution—the Church and the House of Peers—are openly assailed, and there can no longer be the shadow of a doubt as to the consequences of the success of those attacks.

The first result of this open declaration of ultimate designs, of this clear manifestation of the intentions entertained by the Movement, has been a great increase to the active strength of the Conservatives. This was natural. Nobody can be acquainted with the state of the British empire, without becoming aware how immense a body of interests, and how vast a force of opinion, are interwoven with the stability of the present system. Now that disguise is thrown off—now that operations are no longer carried on by sapping and mining, but that open attack has replaced covert hostility,—now that the nation understands it is no longer a question between ins and outs—between Lord Melbourne and Sir Robert Peel, but between one form of government and another,—it was inevitable that neutrality and indifference should disappear. Hence it is that the Conservatives now nearly equal their opponents in the House of Commons ; and in the recent single elections in the great counties of Devonshire, Staffordshire, and Northamptonshire, the working of this spirit is still more unequivocally displayed.

Another most important consequence has been the tacit secession of a large number of the old

Whig Peers who supported Lord Grey. We may perceive that Lord Melbourne was unable to command more than half the number of votes which were given to his predecessor ; and it is scarcely probable that the proclamations and letters of Mr. O'Connell, or the plans for reforming their House, in the *Globe* and *Chronicle*, should have increased their favourable disposition towards him. The article in the *Edinburgh Review*, and some other publications, also prove that the Ministers are conscious that much of their support in the House of Commons is hollow. The body of aristocratic Whigs in that assembly, although their dependence upon popular constituencies may induce greater caution and reserve, fully share in the feelings of their associates in the Lords.

Although it is evident that the aspect of affairs is at the present juncture far more favourable to the Conservative cause than it has hitherto been, yet I would earnestly caution them against being too much led away, against entertaining too sanguine expectations, or supposing that the tide will set uniformly in their favour. I believe that of what may be strictly called reaction there has not been a particle. We have been strengthened by the accession of many neutrals, by the awakened energy of the torpid and the careless, by the discovery of many in the ranks of our opponents that their position was a false one. We have not yet gained one inch upon the democratic spirit ; on the contrary, the very same causes which have

strengthened us, have strengthened it in a nearly similar ratio. In the last Parliament we were 130, the Radicals were 100 ; in this we are 270 *, they are 170. In the last Parliament they were violently opposed to a Ministry with 400 supporters, and inclined to Conservatism ; in this, they are leagued with a Ministry absolutely dependent upon them, having only 180 supporters of its own, and disposed to go great lengths with them. They have succeeded in defeating and destroying Lord Grey's Government for its Conservative tendencies. We have failed in sustaining a Conservative Administration of a more decided character. In the last Parliament we, as a party, were a small minority ; but the majority were comparatively moderate in their tone and measures, and disposed to pursue a policy not greatly at variance with our views : in this Parliament we are a powerful minority ; but a majority is still arrayed against us, and is infinitely more violent in its spirit, and disposed to far more daring measures of subversion than its predecessor.

Such is the impartial view of our real position—of the advantages we have gained, of the counter-balances of which we must not lose sight. We have much to cheer us on, much to inspire us in our arduous struggle, much to inspire hope, much

* I mean that the Conservative party, the friends and supporters of Sir R. Peel's Administration, amounted to 270. To these may be added about 40 not actually Conservatives, yet disposed to vote with them upon most important questions.

to stimulate our best exertions. It would be idle to delude ourselves into the belief that the battle is won—that an immense opposing force is not marshalled against us. We must not continue to calculate upon constant accession to our strength in the same proportion as we have received it during the last eighteen months. It was impossible that a system so noble in itself, so venerable by all its associations, so much identified with our best feelings, and blended with our dearest interests, should not have struck out its roots far and wide in the community. The hold which the Constitution has upon the feelings and attachment of the people is immense; and we are now in the process of ascertaining the extent and the force of this sentiment. But on the other hand everything has tended to spread the doctrines and the passions of democracy very generally through large classes of society; and we must not expect that those who have once imbibed will readily abandon them. As the struggle becomes closer, and the objects less disguised and more apparent, each party will receive additions to its numbers up to a certain point; but a period may shortly arrive when almost every individual will have made his election between the two principles, and when these fluctuations will be rarer.

The admission of the Edinburgh Reviewer, that the property of the country is hostile to the Movement, is a most important one. He must have been inspired by some singular and evanescent im-

pulse of candour and sincerity, when he granted a position fatal to his cause. The property of the country opposed to the present Government!—not merely the great colossal fortunes, nor only the affluent gentry,—but the property of the country, from the class possessing an independence of 500*l.* a-year. Let us not lose sight of this fact,—let us not forget a statement coming from a quarter which invests it with added weight, because it must have been a reluctant concession of a truth too obvious to be denied. The property of the country opposed to the Movement! In these times we cannot feel quite certain that designs which are opposed by the property of the country may not succeed, but we may at least venture to assert that they ought not to do so. The property of the country opposed to Radicalism! Hear this, you who possess property; and yet slumber in inactivity!—Hear it, you who enjoy the inestimable blessings of independence, and yet trifle with the spirit of political and democratic agitation!—Hear it, all who value the inheritance of your fathers, or the acquired fruits of your own labours!—Hear it, and draw this corollary from it—a corollary certain as mathematical demonstration,—that if the property of the country be opposed to Radicalism, Radicalism will be opposed to the property of the country. There is little of the temper of Quakerism in that party—little disposition to requite active hostility with meek forbearance—little scruple in the pursuit of its objects. The property of the

country is the most tempting bait with which to excite the appetite of the democracy. It always requires great self-restraint in the Radical party to resist the temptation of stimulating their followers by so seducing an incentive; but if, in addition, they have the provocation of finding its powerful weight thrown into the scale against them, doubt not that they will determine to subvert it. The influence of property is so strong, so steady, and so extensive, that in the long run it will certainly obtain the victory, unless it be broken down by some violent and sudden effort.

If this truth be not apparent already to the Radical party, it will soon be practically impressed upon their conviction, and they will be more moderate and scrupulous, than I am disposed to believe them, if they allow any abstract reverence or respect for the rights of property to interfere with the attempt to subdue its resistance, by shaking its foundations.

I trust that the preceding remarks may convey to my readers juster ideas of the composition, principles, and objects of the Conservative party, than they would derive from the polemical articles of the ministerial journals. They consist in these positions:—That the Conservative party is not identical with the Tory party,—that it includes, indeed, the Tories, but that it is a more comprehensive term, and that the basis is a wider one;—that the Conservative party may be defined to consist of all that part of the community who are attached to the Con-

stitution in Church and State, and who believe that it is threatened with subversion by the encroachments of democracy. That this definition does not necessarily suppose an abstract horror of all innovation, or an illiberal and contracted view of politics. That, on the contrary, the opinions and feelings of the great body of the Conservatives in this country are liberal, candid, and generous. That they do not oppose a dogged resistance to the progress of improvement, but that they are prepared to proceed upon the conviction, that they gain many steps in advance by adopting much that has already been accomplished. They consider that the march of democracy, with its eternal warfare against all that exists, is a retrograde one.

With regard to its numbers, and social position, the Conservative party does not consist alone of the Peerage,—of what are invidiously called the ‘privileged orders,’ or of the political adherents of former ministries,—it embraces a vast proportion of the numerical amount of the population. It extends into every quarter of the empire, and every class of the community. It rests upon the support of the majority of the property of the country, and it is sustained by the attachment to the National Church.

I do not wish to underrate all the formidable influences opposed to it; the radical and democratic spirit prevalent in the large town constituencies in England, and still more in Scotland; the hostility of the Dissenters; the power of Mr. O’Connell in Ire-

land, and the organized opposition of the Roman Catholic population. Admitting, as I fully do, that we are in the unfortunate condition of a nation divided upon questions of vital importance into great opposing parties, and distracted by all the bitter animosities, which the keenest party strife can occasion ; I yet claim for the Conservatives the rank of a national party, comprising a vast section of the people.

CHAPTER IV.

The House of Lords.

THE House of Lords, and the Church of Ireland, are the two great points attacked. The battle is to be fought on this ground. It is of the utmost importance that the defence of these vital institutions should be conducted with firmness, temper, and skill.

It is equally necessary that it should be carried on with unremitting perseverance, and with a devotion of all the time and efforts of the party to such essential objects. The House of Lords is the great barrier to the encroachments of the Radicals. How can it strengthen its position? How can it most effectually oppose the assaults which are made upon it? Its strength consists in its being the virtual representative of the opinions and sentiments of the Conservative body. It is contending for its own existence; its influence and power will be augmented, by everything which brings it forward as the efficient organ of the division of public opinion which it represents.

The Conservative body in the House of Lords possesses, in the highest degree, the requisites of talent, firmness of purpose, elevation, and integrity of character. It appears to me, that there is a much more methodical and practical mode of transacting public business there, than in the House of Com-

mons. They are less overlaid with second-rate speeches, debates on insignificant subjects, petitions, and all the cumbrous impediments which clog every step of the Commons. I think that they may avail themselves of these advantages, to come more prominently forward to divide the attention of the public, and to contrast themselves advantageously with the popular assembly. As it is, the Lower House profits by its own defects.

After the Session has commenced, and one or two debates upon motions for papers, or upon the Address, have taken place, the House of Lords has nothing to do. Bills upon all sorts of important matters are introduced into the Commons, and drag their weary length along amidst every sort of tedious procrastination and delay. It is seldom that any pass before three-fourths of the Session have elapsed, and, just at the very close, after the public have become thoroughly wearied with their names, and the long wordy debates which have marked their progress, they are sent up in a mass to the Lords. All this time the Upper House has had no real business of any kind. In its legislative capacity it has been quite unemployed. All the measures which have occupied the public attention have been discussed in the Commons till they have exhausted the patience of the people. The Peers have been but little, comparatively, in the public eye. They have had no share in the real legislative business of the Session. At length, when subjects are exhausted, when the public is tired, when the Session

has been protracted to an inconvenient time of the year, they are at last called upon to commence their labours. Many bills they are compelled to reject, because it is impossible that they should afford them sufficient examination. Many are withdrawn, because it is impracticable to proceed with them. They find the public mind indisposed to follow their debates, and their arguments strike upon a jaded attention. The labours of the Session are, in a great degree, lost, and a cry is raised against the Peers as a factious assembly, as a house of obstructives, as an impediment to all the business of the nation, because the House of Commons spends six months in talking instead of doing its work, and then expects the House of Lords to register its edicts without examination.

Now I would desire that the House of Lords should no longer remain contented in this state of forced inaction during the most precious part of the Session. I would wish that it should adopt a line, which would place it before the public as much, and as early, as the other branch. I would no longer see it satisfied with an occasional debate upon the production of some papers, or upon the presentation of a petition, and on four days in the week its benches empty, and its sittings terminated at seven o'clock. The House of Lords has, within itself, all the means of acquiring a vastly-increased influence over public opinion. It possesses high and commanding intellects, acute minds, versed in the practical conduct of affairs, lofty station, inde-

pendence, both of character and position. All these are materials which require only to be used. I conceive that in its smaller numbers, and in the less active prevalence of the restless desire of personal notoriety, it possesses qualifications to render it the most efficient legislative body of the two.

We have the masculine understanding and energy of the Duke of Wellington,—we have the profound legal acquirements and lucid eloquence of Lord Lyndhurst,—we have received the important accessions of Lords Canterbury, Ashburton, and Abinger,—we have the statesmanlike abilities of Lords Aberdeen, Wharncliffe, and Harrowby. We want no means of producing an impression upon the public mind, and of enabling the House of Lords to take that prominent place in the eyes of the nation to which its station entitles it. It places itself in an unnecessarily subordinate and disadvantageous situation, when it consents to wait upon the dilatoriness of the Commons, and when it restricts its labours to the correction and revision of theirs. It is thus thrown into the shade, its existence is almost forgotten, and it only comes into action at the very end of the Session; and is only known as rejecting, postponing, or modifying the measures of the Lower House.

This purely defensive position is a dangerous one for a body which has to contend against strong prejudices and party enmity. The House of Lords must consider that the circumstances in which they are placed are novel and anomalous. Prece-

dent, analogy, habit, custom, must be bent and adapted to the altered state of their relations to the House of Commons, the Executive, and the Country. They must remember that they now bear the brunt of the Democratic assault. Their very existence is at stake, and no sacrifice of time or exertion should be grudged, if they feel that it is in their power, by any deviation from their accustomed routine, to occupy a more favourable position in the changed state of the national affairs.

I entertain a strong opinion that it would be desirable for the Conservative party in the House of Lords to originate a certain number of measures, in conformity with the views and intentions of Sir Robert Peel's Administration. I would wish them to work out the principles laid down in his celebrated Address to the Electors of Tamworth, and subsequently embodied in the different Bills, which, during his short term of office, he had an opportunity of at least submitting to the Legislature. No friend to the House of Lords could desire to see them running a race of popularity against the Commons, and endeavouring to outbid them for the applause of the Democracy. But it is generally admitted that certain measures of practical reform are absolutely required, as much by the universal demand of the nation, as by their own perfect reasonableness, justice, and expediency. They formed the principal part of the scheme of policy unfolded by the late Conservative Administration.

Some of these branches fall peculiarly within

the province of the Peers Spiritual and Temporal. Why should the House of Lords not take the initiative,—put forward its claims as an independent branch of the Legislature,—introduce, and send to the other House, Bills framed upon the plan of those already prepared? I know of no precedent which should preclude such a course, except where there might be money clauses, which could be left for insertion by the Commons. It might be said that it would be an unusual line to take the conduct of a number of questions of high national interest out of the hands of the Executive. The departure from rule would be only in the number, since nothing is more common than for individual members of both Houses to bring forward Bills on various subjects; and it is not more contrary to precedent for a majority in the Lords to assume the conduct of certain measures, with or without the concurrence of the Ministry, than for the Ministry to retain office in defiance of the Opposition of a majority in the Lords. If they chose to resign, it would be a far more advantageous ground of difference—that they retired because the House of Lords passed measures of Reform to which they were not parties, than that it had rejected Bills which they had carried through the Commons.

The manifest expediency of a division of labour between the two Houses, when the Commons are perceptibly overwhelmed with the accumulation, is another argument of obvious weight. Why should half the most important public questions be in abeyance, while the Commons are engrossed with

some one or two, or with some matter of merely private or party interest—such as the case of Baron Smith, or the Committee on Mr. Sheil's dinner conversation at the Athenæum? The subjects, for example, of Reform in the Church, and of Commutation of Tithe, might with peculiar propriety be taken up by the Upper House.

It must be anticipated, as a necessary consequence of late changes, that harmony will never be preserved uninterruptedly for any long period between the two branches of the Legislature. We must look forward to frequent collisions on various subjects. We must lay our account to formidable attacks from the Radical party on every occasion upon which the Peers exercise an independent judgment. The rivalry between the two Houses may probably not be temporary or evanescent. The influences opposed to the Peers must not be underrated. No means which can be adopted to strengthen them in the country should be omitted.

The preceding suggestions are founded upon the principle of the Lords availing themselves, to a greater extent than they have been accustomed to do, of the powers inherent in them as an independent branch of the Legislature. Whatever may be the mode of constituting legislative bodies—whether by hereditary right, by popular election, or otherwise, they act upon the community at large not by means of their organization, but in proportion to the abilities and statesmanlike powers they display. One of the clap-trap Radical cries is, that the Peers are a few hundred individuals opposed to a nation.

Why is this description incorrect? 1st. Because they are not opposed to a nation, but warmly and thoroughly supported by the great majority of the property, and by no inconsiderable numerical proportion of the population. 2ndly. Because they do not assimilate to the nature of a body of individuals more than the few hundred members of the House of Commons do. Both are integral parts of the Constitution; both are deliberative public assemblies, and of both that very publicity is an essential attribute. The nation will judge them by their works, and not by the mode of their formation. If the House of Commons should continue to exhibit the same inefficiency—the same dilatoriness—the same proneness to trivial debates—the same wordiness of second-rate orators—the same want of discretion in wasting its time upon petty private squabbles, it is not the large constituencies which can prevent its character and influence from sinking in public estimation. If the House of Lords bring forward well-advised measures of practical utility—if they show in the discussion of them senatorial talent, and in the conduct of them through the House business-like arrangement,—if they enter upon a separate sphere of action, and prove that their views and policy are in accordance with the expectations of the great and liberal Conservative party in this nation, all the clamour of the Radical press will not prevent their acquiring great and increased weight and authority in the community.

CHAPTER V.

On the Objects of the Movement or Radical Party.

I remember during the discussions on the Reform Bill once having a conversation with a very well-known and prominent leader of the Movement party in the House of Commons. I expressed my apprehensions that the contemplated changes would lead to more extensive innovations upon the Constitution; and particularly that the House of Lords would be exposed to very serious attacks. He replied, "Your fears are without foundation, because while Schedule A. is universally condemned, the House of Lords is sustained by the public opinion throughout the nation." We were walking in Oxford-street at the time, and I recollect that he added, "The Lords are safe, because if you were to stop all the people we see passing, and ask them the question, ninety-nine out of a hundred would declare for the preservation of the House of Peers." "Yes," I replied, "but granting that they will do so now, will you ensure me that they will maintain the same opinion three years hence." We see that the event has justified my anticipations, and that the House of Lords is now the great object of the attacks of the Democratic party. I mention this little anecdote, because I think it illustrative of the principles of the Movement. My companion rested the security

of the House of Lords not upon his own conviction of its utility, not upon its intrinsic merits, not upon its strength as an integral part of the Constitution ; he applied another test, that of the ephemeral opinion of the multitude, and he reasoned upon it as if it were something fixed, stable, under the perpetual guidance of reason and of truth. He would now probably say that such indeed was the opinion of the pedestrians in Oxford-street at that time, but that the House of Lords had acted very wilfully and foolishly since, and that the passengers had altered their minds. It would never enter his head to doubt whether Oxford-street might not possibly be in error occasionally, and whether any form of government which could be shaken by the passing opinion of the day, might not be in its nature insecure. He would never allow that the guarantee he offered in 1832 was a worthless one, which could give no assurance of durability to anything.

With the Movement everything is built upon sand ; they have no fixed principles of conduct ; they have no opinions of their own. They owe allegiance to what they call the will of the people, and they are prepared to follow this guide wherever it pleases to lead them. To-day they may uphold the Throne, or the Peerage, or the Church, next week half-a-dozen articles in a leading journal may have changed their purposes, and they may assail these institutions as condemned by the spirit of the age, and the voice of the public.

One is always tempted to exclaim with the French

Conventionalist, "Depuis qu'on nous rassassie de principes, comment est ce qu'on ne se souvient jamais que la stabilité est aussi un principe." When a party adopt as their device the infallibility of the popular opinion of the hour, and prescribe as a duty implicit obedience to its mandates, it must appear evident that social institutions are built upon a basis fleeting and unsubstantial as the wind. Nothing is certain except that to-morrow will bring forth something totally different from to-day. This code of the Movement is in some respects exceedingly convenient. It absolves them from the necessity of any elaborate explanation of their views, principles, or objects. It releases them from the obligation of consistency, or of adherence to any opinions. My companion in Oxford-street would doubtless conceive himself at full liberty to urge on the attacks upon the Peers, as soon as he had reason to suppose that the ninety-nine out of a hundred passers-by no longer regarded them with the same favour. We have therefore this difficulty in dealing with the Radicals, not only that these ultimate aims and intentions must remain in obscurity, but that they could not, if they would, give them a more distinct and definite shape. They can only say, "We may tell you what we think, and what we wish, but we cannot tell you what the people may think or wish a little while hence; and as therefore we follow not our own judgment, not any settled purposes of our own, but the will of the people, whatever that may be, for the time being, we cannot give you

any valid assurance as to what may be our line of action."

I believe that if the Movement leaders in the House of Commons were to express themselves thus they would speak with perfect candour and truth. I have already observed that there is in fact no head of the English Movement, possessing any controlling influence, or actuated by any determined purpose. Mr. O'Connell is the only real chief of a party on that side of the House. I doubt if many of the Members have ever coolly and distinctly held up to their minds the consequence of the success of their various Bills and Motions; and if they were to carry them, that they would be taken by surprise and be at a loss what to attempt next. I believe that the majority of them have never sought or wished any great changes in our social system, but live from hand to mouth, caring very little about that future which they would render so uncertain, but just occupied with the immediate object, and seeking to recommend themselves to their constituents, or to make a sensation in the public eye by their advocacy of Vote by Ballot, Triennial Parliaments, or any other popular questions. They are borne along, drifting down the rapid current of events, making frequent splashes in the water to persuade others, and perhaps to delude themselves, that they are really swimming towards a fixed point.

However this may be, the effect is just the same upon the country as if they all worked upon a settled plan, and steadily contemplated the goal to which

the course is directed. The postilion from London to Barnet helps the traveller to York just as effectually forward a step of his journey, although he may be a stranger to Doncaster, and may never even have heard of the Minster. The tactics of the Movement consist in a series of attacks in detail against every barrier to the uncontrolled supremacy of the Democracy. Wherever they carry a point they gain an accession of strength; and they may be quite sure that if those who have helped them forward so far, flag by the way, there will be others to take up a winning game. It is this peculiar characteristic which gives to the Movement or Radical party so much of vagueness and ambiguity, and which renders the future, so far as they have any influence over it, so shadowy, doubtful, and uncertain. Every other political party that has ever existed has associated itself with the maintenance and assertion of certain fixed principles of one sort or another; but the Radicals, by establishing the rule that the opinion of the majority is always right, and ought always to be obeyed, have secured themselves against the necessity of ever being obliged to adhere to any limit. Instability, then, is a part of their nature. They are always engaged in a pursuit they know not of what: they have erected into the guide and pole-star of all their actions that popular, fleeting opinion, as it is called, which is proverbial for its levity and uncertainty. They think it quite a sufficient motive for any change of conduct in them, for the adoption of any

measure which they had lately condemned, for the agitation of any question which they had formerly deprecated, that the public voice demands it. If they defend the Established Church, or the Monarchy, or the House of Peers, to-day, they may vote for the voluntary system, or for a Republic, to-morrow, merely alleging as an excuse that the question has made great progress in the public mind, and that a new settlement of the matter can no longer be resisted. So far their theory would only be an absurd one, leading to constant agitation and disorganizing changes in society, precluding almost the hope that it could ever repose securely upon anything. But there is at least as much artifice as extravagance in this doctrine. They know very well that this public opinion, which they affect to consider as the spontaneous working of the intellect of the community, is a factitious creation. A few leading articles in newspapers,—a little activity among their agents in the manufacture of petitions,—a public meeting or two, at which two or three political lions are present, will get up a popular cry upon any subject in three months, however foreign it may have been to the people's thoughts. They make the giants first, and then they slay them. They begin by blowing the bellows, and then they cry fire.

Since the nation has unhappily, of late years, been so much habituated to political excitement, channels have been formed through which the restless part of the community have been accus-

tomed to be acted upon, and they respond easily when the chord is touched by the well-known hand. The whole machinery of agitation is matured. The newspaper editor has his hint,—the getter-up of petitions makes his usual circuit,—the signatures which are given one year for Reform, or for Mr. and Mrs. Deacle, are given the next in favour of the Municipal Corporations Bill, or whatever is the clap-trap of the day; and what appears to be a great, simultaneous, unpremeditated movement of the public mind, is traceable to the activity and bustle of a few individuals, who know how to give an impulse.

I conceive that the present leaders of the English Movement party in Parliament act upon no definite plan—that they have no outline for the future clearly traced. They perceive that there is a current setting strongly in the democratic direction, and they embark upon it, adventurers in a voyage of discovery. Where it is to waft them they do not distinctly see; and few of them seem to have thrown off, at least ostensibly, all attachment to the English Constitution. I imagine that, just at this moment, they would be quite puzzled, were the Government actually in their hands, to know what use to make of it, or to what extent they should go in realizing the visions they have indulged in. As yet there is something so little practical in their schemes, that I almost regretted, when Lord Melbourne's Government was formed, that a due proportion of them had not been included in the Cabinet. As their

support was so essential to the Ministry, their demand could not have been refused, had it been strongly urged. It would have been more desirable that they, by being actual component parts of the Administration, should have been placed under the necessity of declaring some of their ultimate intentions, than that, as they are now, lying in ambush under the shelter of the Executive, they should possess the power of pressing forward whatever points they pleased, avoiding all responsibility. They judged wisely, for the attainment of their ends, in not insisting upon a share of office. They probably felt that the pear was not ripe; that if they merely came in as a minority, and in the less prominent situations, their importance, and that of their party, would be lessened, while the country was not yet prepared for seeing them the declared rulers of its fortunes. They knew that the jealousy of the Whigs would have been awakened, while there would have been a mutual dependence, a necessity for co-operation; now, the obligation is entirely on the side of the Whigs. As members of a Government they must either have brought forward some of their schemes of economy and retrenchment, which would effect the entire breaking up of all our establishments, or they must, in the teeth of their former declarations, have given a virtual approval of them, by acquiescing in their continuance. Under every point of view, their acceptance of office, particularly on any other footing than that of entire equality with the Whigs,

would have been a very capital blunder, and one which it seems they were too wary to make.

The present position of the Movement seems to me as formidable a one for the country, and as favourable a one for themselves, as can well be imagined. The Ministry exists but by their support; they have none of the difficulties of Government, but can securely pursue their own objects, and press the adoption of them upon the Cabinet. They have gained a great accession of numbers; they are sure that the fruits of all the popular measures which the Whigs must bring forward will be gathered, not by the authors, but by themselves. Irish Municipal Reform, for example, will give additional power, not to Lord Melbourne, but to Mr. O'Connell. The Whigs cannot do otherwise than propitiate the Democracy by fresh measures of a popular character; and it is impossible to propitiate them without adding to their power. They must, therefore, gain strength even by remaining quiet, and receiving what their Ministerial allies must, for their own sakes, bestow upon them. Accessions to the popular force must be for the sole ultimate advantage of the most popular party. There is but one check to their unlimited sway,—but one danger against which they must use a little precaution. They must not goad the Administration to such an extreme degree as to force them to turn to Conservatism as the lesser evil of the two. A strong Conservative Administration is equally an object of dread and aversion to both. They have

the resource therefore of threatening each other with it, should they disagree. It is evident that as the Conservatives nearly equal the united strength of the other two, the Ministerialists might oppose any glaringly revolutionary projects by resigning, and throwing the affairs of the country into the hands of Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington. But they know the intenseness of party animosity which would render this the most painful of all alternatives, and that it will require but a very sparing exercise of the virtue of moderation to forbear from pushing the Melbournites to such an extremity.

I have stated without reserve my impressions of the formidable nature of the Radical power. Its encroachments have been steady, rapid, and attended with success. It has awakened a powerful resistance indeed throughout the nation, but it would be idle to persuade ourselves that it is yet shaken, or even that its advance has been stopped. Whether the institutions of this country will be found so deeply rooted as to resist the pressure which is directed against them, is a question yet undecided ; but it cannot be an uninteresting speculation to endeavour to trace the objects and tendencies of the Movement, and to estimate, as far as we can, the practical consequences of its progress, should it be unchecked. The Movement, in fact, means the advance and increase of the democratic power in the community—it is the augmentation of weight and influence of mere numbers, as opposed

to all the other elements of social importance which have hitherto maintained, in England, an indisputable ascendancy. If we examine all the writings and speeches of the organs of this party,—if we regard the nature and aim of the questions which they are intent upon carrying, we shall find that they all resolve themselves into this :—“ Give more power to the mass of the population, and remove those barriers which the English Constitution has erected against the uncontrolled supremacy of the Democracy.” Nothing can be more definite, more plain, and distinct than this,—nothing more vague, shadowy, and unmeaning than the expectations of practical benefit or advantage which are to flow from these changes. Vote by Ballot signifies very clearly—Let us devise a mode of voting which shall extinguish the influence which the landlord may possess with his tenant, the employer with the employed, the master with the servant, the customer with the tradesman ;—let a means be contrived of evading all the influences by which property acts upon the hopes or fears of men, and we shall greatly diminish the weight of property in the scale, and proportionably add to that of numbers. The voluntary system says, very distinctly,—let us deprive the State of all that support which is derived from her connexion with religion,—let religion take its chance,—let piety be taxed,—let the poor pay for the consolations it affords,—let there be economy in indifference : only let us drag down the Church from her present independence, and let us convert

her from a prop to the Constitution into a mendicant to the people.

Reform in the House of Lords means—Here is an institution which has more sympathy with the interests of property than with the inclinations or caprices of the multitude. Here is a power, which while it exists independent of the Democracy, will not act in entire subserviency to its dictates. Let us get rid of this obstacle, either by abolishing it, or by entirely changing its nature, and by converting it from a check upon the democratic power into an instrument and agent of it. Triennial Parliaments, Extension of the Suffrage, Repeal of the Laws requiring payment of Rates and Taxes as a Qualification for Voters, Irish Municipal Reform, all these are but so many different means to the same end—so many repetitions of the same notes—more power, more power, more power to the numerical masses.

All the favourite measures of the Movement are but so many different attempts made for the accomplishment of this purpose, but they wholly forgot to inform us what are the particular advantages to be derived, or the grievances to be redressed, through the instrumentality of this uncontrolled popular sovereignty. They have three or four vague phrases to represent all these prospective benefits. “The people want good government, the people desire cheap government; the people have a right to expect that their laws shall be framed on the principle of producing the greatest happiness to the greatest number, for the longest period of time.” Of course,

we admit all these maxims, but we regard them as stale, unmeaning truisms, which do not touch upon the real points at issue. We can afford to grant them, and defend all our positions upon them. We think the English Constitution a good government, the best we have ever heard of; a much better one than a more purely democratic form. We consider that economy, as far as it can be beneficially carried, has been acted upon, and will be acted upon under our present system. We maintain that a frame of society like ours, securing personal freedom, the safety of property, the power of elevating themselves in the scale, to all, but at the same time recognizing great inequalities of condition, is far more favourable to the attainment of happiness, because it is far better adapted to elicit varied excellencies of nature, and to stimulate to greater energy of exertion than a more equal social state is.

We again ask the Movement party—"What end do you propose to attain, what positive evils do you think that you will remedy, what good will you procure by the substitution of a democratic form of government for the present one? We suppose that you will be candid enough to admit that such is the goal to which you direct your course—we cannot find that you point out any substantial evils, remediable by legislative means, or that if you did, there is any disinclination under the existing system to remove them. We call upon you to observe, that you have not to deal only with political institutions: the whole distribution of pro-

“ perty, the whole spirit of our society, the feelings,
“ temper, and opinions of all the independent and
“ educated classes, (according to the Edinburgh
“ Reviewer, the people of 500*l.* a-year and upwards)
“ are at variance with democracy. What but misfor-
“ tune and injury to the country can result from the
“ introduction of a principle of so active a nature, in
“ direct opposition to such a body of interests and
“ opinions? It is to raise the standard of a social
“ civil war.”

There is one explanation which the nation is entitled to demand of the representatives of the Movement in the House of Commons. I have shewn indeed why, from their principle of action, from their perpetual reference to the voice of the people as their sole directing power, any guarantee given by them, must be an illusory one; still as they are the ostensible organs of this new party in the State, a distinct declaration of their views and purposes might produce a beneficial effect. We wish to set some bounds to the career of innovation: we think it fair that we should know that those who at least for the moment lead it, should inform us whether they are disposed to restrict themselves to any assigned bounds in their course. When the Reform Bill was brought forward, the Grey Ministry pledged themselves to regard it, as far as they were concerned, as a final settlement of the question. There is no doubt that this engagement has operated in some degree as a check upon the attempts to tamper perpetually with the machinery of our representa-

tive system. In like manner, I should desire to see submitted to the House of Commons, some specific resolutions expressive of its attachment to the fundamental parts of the Constitution, and of its rejection of innovations which should aim at the subversion of the mixed form of government.

The Radical leaders in the House have never openly expressed their desire of carrying their changes to such a length. They throw a veil over the subject. But we have a right to know more: the country has a right to know to what extent it can rely upon the affection of its representatives to the existing Constitution, or whether they only profess a provisional and temporary acquiescence in it. Let us endeavour to understand from them really what they mean, and whether they are at least prepared to state whether there is any part of the fabric to which they are resolved to adhere.

If they will render no such account, if they refuse any pledge, we may draw this conclusion, that they are prepared either to lead, or to follow the democratic spirit wherever it can penetrate.

We have then only to ask where this spirit will naturally lead us. The answer is obvious. The spirit of democracy has no power of self-control. It grasps all that it can obtain. It must be checked by counteracting influences, since it possesses no means of self-restraint. It can no more arrest its own progress than a body thrown from a height can remain suspended in mid air. If the counteracting influences are not strong enough to control it,

where will it transport us? It is quite evident that a democratic republic must be the termination. It is equally certain that such a form of government could never be even temporarily established, except by great revolutions in our social, as well as political system.

Those who wish to accomplish such an end, by such means, may go on, but "the time is come," according to the phrase of the day, when persons possessed of a grain of foresight will make their election, and not contribute their assistance to the attainment of partial objects, unless they are prepared to concur in all the consequences.

CHAPTER VI.

On the State of Ireland.

I HAVE often been led to observe how very little the boasted diffusion of knowledge in these enlightened days seems, in fact, to promote its real increase—how few minds in this vast community appear to be stimulated, by the great facility of acquiring imperfect and superficial information upon every variety of subject, to push their own inquiries further, to investigate truths, and to detect and expose very flagrant errors. It would appear as if, with the great body of the reading public, their own faculties were merely passive recipients, taking the impressions made upon them, but not awakened to any mental action by the process. I remember a foreigner of great acuteness once telling me, that he had been much struck, in casual conversation with a respectable tradesman on some political topic of the day, with several very sensible and judicious remarks which he had made. Impressed with a very favourable idea of the intelligence of this class in England, he pursued his walk, and happening to fall in with another, he was a little startled to find that he adopted precisely the same tone of observation. Struck with the coincidence, he contrived to introduce the subject to one or two others, who all adopted exactly the same tone, and reiterated the

remarks he had before heard, without addition, diminution, or any sensible difference in the substance.

He retired to dine at the Travellers, pondering upon this circumstance, and inclined to believe that the class he had been conversing with in the morning were a particularly intelligent race of men, but with a degree of uniformity in the structure of their minds, and in the operation of their intellectual faculties, which he (being something of a metaphysician) was disposed to regard as a fact of new and extraordinary interest to physiological science. He was interrupted in his meditations by the waiter bringing him the *Times*, which cut short his speculations by giving him, in its leading article, the original of which he had met with so many faithful copies in the course of the morning.

No one branch of our domestic policy has latterly excited such engrossing attention as that of Irish affairs, ecclesiastical and civil. The influence of Ireland has been felt most powerfully in all the recent fluctuations of parties. Irish questions are those upon which the whole issue of the contests have been placed; disquisitions and debates upon Irish matters fill all our periodicals, and engross the time of Parliament. There is every inducement to inquiry, every motive to point a searching spirit of investigation in that direction. Yet it always appears to me that little progress is made in the study of the peculiar state of society existing in that country; that we witness the effects without inquiring into their causes, and see in the strife and

struggles of party in that country an effervescence, the real springs of which we never attempt to penetrate. We seem to satisfy ourselves with echoing the declamatory statements of the contending divisions. The hackneyed phrases of—seven centuries of misgovernment—proportion of Catholics to Protestants—ages of oppression—hereditary domination of a bigoted faction, &c., are reiterated till we seem to adopt the partial and exaggerated language of party clamour, as the real incontrovertible facts of the case, and as containing all that need be said or could be known upon the subject.

This inertness of mind, this disposition to rest satisfied with information derived through such suspicious channels, is not confined to the generality of private persons. There appears in the whole body of public men connected with the present Ministry the same predominant impressions, received from a superficial glance at the surface—the same belief that they perfectly comprehend the whole subject. I never have been able, in the speeches of Lord John Russell, to trace the slightest indication that his mind had caught the distinguishing features of the case, or that he was in the smallest degree aware of the real difficulties which embarrass every question connected with the Sister Country. The popular current superficial view of the state of Ireland is this, that it is a country containing an immense Catholic population, and a very small proportion of Protestants of the Church of England,—that the Protestants of the Church of

England, supported by the power of the Tory Administrations at home, have established a monopoly of offices, places of trust and consideration, dignity and emolument, and have held their Catholic fellow-countrymen in a state of civil bondage,—that they have been governed by a narrow, bigoted, tyrannical spirit, making a different religious belief operate as a disqualification in every profession, a bar across every path which led to distinction or to fortune,—that the Established Church of Ireland being, as it is, the Church of a small minority of the people, is one great overgrown abuse,—that the English Cabinets have been contented to rule the country for years through the instrumentality of this faction, thereby perpetuating and exasperating religious differences, and sustaining through force the system of a sort of religious oligarchy, oppressive and unjust to the body of the nation,—that a wise and generous policy now dictates a conduct diametrically opposed in all respects to this harsh and exclusive system,—that the first object and care of the Executive in Ireland must be to obliterate every trace of those unjust preferences on the score of religion which have so long been the watchword of our Government. Protestant ascendancy must no longer be the principle on which power is to be exercised, honours or emoluments conferred—the interests of the great Catholic body must be duly considered, and equal eligibility of the two religious persuasions to all civil appointments practically acted upon,—that the domineering and

tyrannical spirit of Orangeism must be crushed and discountenanced in every possible manner,—that the Irish Church Establishment, being unnecessary to the Protestants, and both oppressive and insulting to the Catholics, must be reduced or abolished,—that, in fine, Ireland has hitherto been treated as a conquered Catholic country under a garrison of Orangemen, backed by English power; that she is now to be governed as a free Catholic nation, in which the interests of the Protestants are to be reduced to their proper proportion.

I hope that I have made a fair epitome of the prevailing opinions of the Ministerial party with regard to Ireland. It appears to me that I have given a tolerably faithful and certainly not an overcharged transcript of the usual tenour of the leading articles in the *Globe* and *Chronicle*, and of the substance of the orations of Lord John Russell and Mr. Ward. Now I assert, that whatever Minister were to form his opinions, or to mould his system of policy, upon these statements, would do so upon the most superficial grounds—upon views either wholly erroneous, or partial, confined, and limited. I contend that the most material circumstances, whether as regards the internal state of Ireland, or her peculiar relations with this country, are entirely lost sight of, or indeed never seem to have been noticed in these loose commonplace representations of her condition. Ireland is carelessly considered as a country in which religious intolerance and party violence in the Protestants having been en-

- encouraged by the undue partiality of the Government, have generated a strong reaction and deep disaffection in the Catholic portion of the community. It is assumed that a change of system will remove all these evils, and place the two persuasions upon the same amicable and tolerant footing with regard to each other on which they stand in many of the German states. Nothing could be more delightful than such a consummation ; but there are obstacles in the way of it, arising from a wide difference in the circumstances of the two cases. The lines of religious demarcation are drawn, if I may allow myself such an illustration, quite at right angles to each other in the two nations. In Germany the social pyramid is divided perpendicularly from the top to the bottom, and each mode of faith has its adherents among every class,—the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the noble and the lowly-born ; but in Ireland the line is drawn horizontally : the property, the rank, and a great proportion of the middle orders being Protestant, while a vast Catholic population, composed of a very poor peasantry, are divided by an unnaturally wide interval from the other classes. It results from this that the question becomes a social as well as a religious one. Difference of faith becomes a symbol of difference of condition ; and the indigent are separated from the wealthy not only by the inequalities of fortune, but also by the ever-operating influence of opposite and hostile creeds.

Another important difference is, that the German are separate, independent states, while Ireland is a portion of a powerful and a Protestant empire. It is probable enough that had Ireland been under a government of her own, the Protestant religion might have been almost extirpated, that it owes its existence to the extraneous support which it has derived from this country. It is a favourite topic of Mr. O'Connell's to dwell upon the misgovernment and oppression of seven hundred years, charging England with a uniform course of tyranny and injustice from the first conquest of the country, in the reign of Henry II. No man knows better than Mr. O'Connell how to touch these chords to which the passions of the lower orders of his countrymen respond. When he talks of seven hundred years of oppression, it is a national and not a religious animosity to which he appeals. It appears that we were persecutors nearly four hundred years before we were Protestants, and it may be inferred that Mr. O'Connell might continue inimical to us as Englishmen even were we again Catholics.

But there is an interesting and curious inquiry suggested by this. Mr. O'Connell, on behalf of the Irish Catholic democracy, makes a sweeping national charge of oppression against England, from the days of Earl Strongbow downwards. He, in this, speaks the language which is artfully and perseveringly addressed to the ears of the vast mass of the lower orders. The powerful agency of

religion is employed to keep up in their minds a national distinction, a sense of injury, and feeling of enmity against the English nation, and against that portion of their countrymen whose mode of worship furnishes an evidence of their allegiance to her, and of their originally English origin. Nor can we refuse to admit that these distinctions, to a great extent, really exist: that they are no artificial inventions, either of priests or of agitators; but that they afford a terrible lever to both.

It is a singular fact in the history of that country,—a fact which may furnish abundant matter of speculation to the philosopher, but which must never be lost sight of for a moment by the practical statesman, that the Irish are not one nation. Mr. O'Connell is so far right. Six hundred and fifty years have been unable to produce a kindly and thorough fusion between the conquerors and the conquered, to efface the distinguishing marks of a different origin, or to heal those rankling animosities which still fester in their hearts. Since that epoch how many times has the surface of the world been mapped out afresh? How many times have the limits of the empires and kingdoms of the earth been changed, obliterated, and forgotten? How many new frontiers have been traced, how many new states formed, and into what various forms of those groups called nations has not the great family of mankind resolved itself?

The citizen of Perronne occupies his thoughts little with the memory of Charles the Bold. The

native of Alsace or of Lorraine, deems himself just as good and complete a Frenchman as the inhabitant of Paris. The Catalonian and Castilian are both Spaniards. But the Celtic Irish peasant, divided from his Protestant countrymen by the two great barriers of language and religion, still cherishes the obscure traditions of a remote age ; and, as the Protestant landowner or substantial tradesman pass him on the road, he throws a scowl over his shoulder, and in his deep guttural Gaelic he curses them as Saxon invaders, usurpers, and heretics.

It would be foreign to my purpose to inquire why the aboriginal Irish adhered, almost universally, to the faith of their forefathers, while the English settlers as generally embraced the Protestant creed. It would not be difficult to suggest probable causes in the ignorance and superstition of a wild and uncultivated people,—their attachment to their clergy,—their distaste to any innovation introduced by the English ; or, on the other hand, that the Irish of British descent and connexions should be naturally disposed to imitate the example of their mother country. I take the fact as it was, to show, that upon a national distinction, which time had failed to efface, there was superadded from the period of the Reformation, a difference of religious faith. The combined influence of national feelings and traditions, of a separate language, of a hostile creed, may account for the singular circumstance that the Irish of Celtic

origin, consisting of almost all the lower classes of Roman Catholics, have preserved to this day their national individuality, and cherish a general vague impression that they have been unjustly oppressed and deprived of their rights by foreign conquest and violence.

During this long period, civilization and improvement continued to flow into Ireland through the sole medium of the British settlers. The enterprise, the capital, the property, the intelligence of the country, was centred in them. The confiscations which followed unsuccessful rebellions, particularly in the days of Cromwell, swept away almost all the landed estates from the descendants of the ancient chiefs, and gave the whole territorial possession to the loyal Protestants. Always a minority in point of numbers,—always on the defensive against a population whose naturally fiery passions were quickened by a deeply-graven sense of injury,—yet strong in the resources of their own wealth, intelligence, and courage, as well as in the support of England, the Protestants boldly maintained their superiority. But it may be easily imagined that, placed in such a situation, their daring resolution was not always coupled with great mildness, and that they justly incurred the reproach of that overbearing and arrogant spirit of which we cannot conscientiously acquit the more violent Orangemen.

If the preceding observations are correct, they will serve, I think, to elucidate in some degree

the intricate position of Irish affairs, and convey to English readers a more distinct idea of the real merits of the religious and political feuds which distract that country. They will observe that the agricultural peasant population of Ireland, composed in three out of the four provinces almost exclusively of the Catholic and Celtic tribes, has, during the last thirty or forty years, increased with unexampled rapidity. They comprise the great bulk of the population, and they consist of the cultivators of the soil, from the little farmer renting 30*l.*, 40*l.* or 50*l.* per annum, down to the lowest pauper. The most substantial occupying farmer is in condition much below an independent labourer in this country. His cabin is of mud; his wife and children are bare-legged; his diet is potatoes. There is nothing like a middle class in the rural economy of Ireland, except the intermediate tenants or middle-men may be so called,—a class who were chiefly Protestants, but who are fast becoming extinct. The great and increasing disproportion between the numbers of the Protestants and Catholics, which is so much insisted upon by the Radical party, springs from the rapid multiplication of the pauper peasantry. Unchecked by the restraints which the wants of a higher grade of civilization oppose to the too rapid increase of the species, requiring nothing but the first necessities,—the means of sustaining a merely animal life,—this portion of the Irish population augments in a fearfully disproportionate ratio to the rest. It augments

because it is barbarous,—because it is in a state of nature,—because it is little raised above the condition of savage life,—because it is unfettered by the wants, desires, and artificial necessities of more advanced society.

It is an axiom in Irish politics which ought to be ever present to the mind of the British statesman, that the excess of Catholics over Protestants varies inversely, as the property, intelligence, and civilization of the class of society. I do not mean that this is a necessary consequence of the moral and social effects of the two religions; but that, from the passages in the history of Ireland to which I have adverted, Catholicism has become the faith of the vast mass of the descendants of the aboriginal Celtic tribes composing (except in the North) the lower and laborious orders, while Protestantism is the hereditary badge of those English settlers who have at different times grafted upon Ireland all that she possesses of social improvement.

This very peculiar condition of society will serve, not to justify all the violence and domineering spirit of the Orangemen, but to explain the circumstances which have generated it. They have always felt themselves more or less a garrison in an enemy's country,—preserving by union, by courage, and by the support of this nation, all that they had created of property and improvement. In them has been vested the whole progressive principle of the community, while the Catholic peasantry have remained stationary in everything but population.

In almost all the preceding remarks I have included the Presbyterians of the North with the Protestants of the Established Church. In England they may be at variance, but in Ireland a similarity of position, and the presence of a formidable common foe, have induced a strict alliance.

Such is the problem which Ireland presents to the British statesman ;—a nation split into two great but unequal divisions, separated from each other by language and religion ; the one comprising the immense majority of an unenlightened peasantry, brave, ardent, and naturally generous, but bred up in complete subjection to an extremely ambitious priesthood, and cherishing an hereditary enmity, national as well as religious, against their Protestant fellow-countrymen. This body is confronted by a far smaller numerical amount of Protestants, yet possessing interests which have the most powerful claims upon our consideration and support. The property of the country is Protestant in a still larger proportion than the population is Catholic. The number of Protestants compared with Catholics, in the classes of the nobility and landed gentry, is overwhelming ; in the trading and commercial part of the community, is considerable ; among artisans and small shopkeepers, is still respectable : it is only among the swarming agricultural population of the Southern and Western provinces that the Protestants are entirely swamped and lost.

I would appeal to any unprejudiced mind if such

a state of things is not in its nature most delicate to deal with?—if the difficulties be not great?—if the claims on both sides do not demand our best attention?—and if those of the Protestants have not a deep foundation in justice and policy? They may urge with truth—“We acknowledge our disparity of numbers; but do not, in the name of reason and of equity, put our claims upon your support and protection on that sole basis. We hold all the property of the country, not by the conquest of yesterday, not by spoliation, but by a title of centuries;—we comprise a large proportion of the intelligence, acquirement, and civilization of the nation;—we have established ourselves, or our forefathers have, under the wing of British protection;—we have maintained an unshaken loyalty to you, of which you have the best guarantee in the strong necessity which we have of your support;—we profess the same pure religious faith (the religion of freedom and independence) with yourselves. Do not sacrifice us, and all the high national interests which are linked to us, to the artful machinations and insidious encroachments of our irreconcilable foes. In them England will ever have the hollowest friends, or the most formidable concealed enemies: they have never relinquished or abandoned their final objects; they have never even condescended to deceive you, by agreeing to a nominal compromise; they continue, step by step, to pursue their aims, which are—the entire

“ overthrow of the Established Church, the confiscation of our property, and the separation of the two countries.”

No British statesman can entirely shut his ears to the truth and the force of such an appeal. No one can deny that however much, in some cases, the violence, party spirit, and arrogant demeanour of the Orangemen may require to be repressed and discountenanced, yet that, as a whole, the Protestant portion of the Irish nation have, on the grounds of expediency, of generous feeling, and of rigid justice, the most imperative claims upon the sympathy and support of England.

Let it not be supposed that I am an advocate for the old system of ruling entirely through and by the Protestants,—that I would consider the profession of the Catholic faith a stigma or a cause of exclusion from all offices. It ought, on the contrary, to be the constant object of the Government to efface those unhappy distinctions, and to seek for occasions of exhibiting to the country its disposition to eradicate them. Whenever Catholicism can be met with unconnected with political party,—wherever talent, character, and integrity are to be found in any Catholic candidate for public employment, I would almost give him a preference over any equally qualified Protestant, in the eagerness to manifest that no exclusive spirit should be acted upon hereafter. In the administration of justice, whether civil or criminal, I would, by every mode in which the executive could influence the proceed-

ings of courts of law, enforce the strictest and most impartial equity ; but exhibiting every toleration, indulgence, and even favour, towards the professors of the Catholic faith, as a mode of religious worship. I think that a Ministry is bound to oppose a firm front of opposition to Irish Catholicism as a political party. In that garb nothing can induce me to regard it in any other light than as a domestic enemy, as inveterate as even Napoleon was to the very name and existence of the British empire. Who can doubt that the allegiance of the whole mass of lower Irish Catholics is paid, not to this Government,—not to the laws,—not to the empire,—but to their own priests and to Mr. O'Connell ? And who can flatter himself for a moment into the belief that their objects are not such as this country must, a little sooner or a little later, oppose with all her energy ? We may formerly have committed a mistake, confiding in the loyalty of the Protestants of Ireland, in governing too exclusively through their agency, and thus inflaming the rancour of the hostile parties, instead of attempting to soothe and to amalgamate them together ; but if we were now to adopt an opposite error, and try to govern through the instrumentality of Mr. O'Connell and the Popish priests, we should make a blunder a thousand times more absurd in its nature, and more fatal in its consequences.

If the conclusions drawn from the preceding views of the state of Ireland be applied to the great pending question of the Established Church

there, the subject will, I think, appear in a different light to those who have not been familiar with them. Let us for a moment place ourselves in the position of the Protestants of Ireland thus confronted by the organized force of Mr. O'Connell and the Priesthood, wielding at their entire devotion the whole Catholic population. Let us endeavour to estimate the effect which must be produced, the alarm which must have been awakened by the rapid yet steady increase of power in the country, and of influence in the Legislature, which he has acquired within the last six years. Let us then ask whether there is anything unreasonable in their considering the defence of that Church Establishment, which is the first object of attack with the Agitators, as the great test of the power and inclination of this country to defend them in their unceasing struggle with their skilful, enterprising, and insidious foe? They regard it first of all as property which ought to be applied to the uses for which it was set apart. They look upon it as Church property, which in the eyes of those possessing a similar faith ought to be doubly sacred. They hold it as Church property, not only possessed by the Protestant Church of Ireland for centuries, but as in an especial manner confirmed and secured to them by that great national compact the Act of Union. They esteem it, and not without good cause, the great link between the two countries, as the shield of the British connexion, as the great barrier and safeguard of their interests, temporal

as well as spiritual, against this tremendous combined influence of religious differences with national and hereditary animosities, organized and pointed against them by the subtle agency of the priesthood, and set in motion by the abilities of Mr. O'Connell. They must inevitably be filled with apprehension at the assertion of the principle of population, of the numbers professing the two religions being constituted the sole test of their comparative claims in a new distribution of Church property. They cannot be so blind as not to see that the admission of such a basis must be fatal to them. They behold all around them a rising tide of Catholic population swelling as rapidly as even in the United States. They know that this numerical disproportion must increase. They are aware that two causes contribute to augment it,—the primitive state and merely animal wants of the peasantry, and the sort of persecution, negative or positive, to which the few Protestants in the lower classes scattered among this hostile mass must invariably be exposed. They have reason, under these circumstances, to cling to the Established Church; they are right in regarding it as the ark, not only of a purer religious faith, but of social improvement, of the rights of property and of a more advanced civilization. They naturally appeal to England, they state their claims upon our protection, they invoke our succour. How is this solemn appeal to be answered?

I conceive that the first question we have to ask is, does this Church Establishment in fact press

upon the body of the Catholic population as a real grievance? Is it an institution, the existence of which is an actual evil, or the abolition of which would be felt as a practical benefit?

Nothing can be more certain than that the tithe is *pro tanto* a subtraction from the rent, and that ultimately it is a burden to the owner and not to the occupier, or, to speak more correctly, that it is a division of the profits of the land, after the farmer has been remunerated, between two legal claimants, the clergyman and the landlord, instead of one sole appropriation of such profits to the landlord. It is equally certain, however, that the intervention of this third party, the clergyman, to every agreement between the other two, while at the same time his claims cannot be modified or affected by the conditions to which they may subscribe, operates injuriously. It operates injuriously, not because it is an appropriation of a part of the rent of land to the uses of the Church, but because it is a fluctuating demand. Because it is not, as in the case of landlord and tenant, regulated by a previous bargain or a mutual understanding, but augments in proportion to the amount of the produce, and is therefore a tax varying in proportion to the capital and labour expended upon the farm. It therefore operates injuriously upon the landlord, whose ground is thus possibly deprived of improvements which it would otherwise have received; upon the tenant, because the profitable employment of his capital is either checked or taxed; and upon the community, be-

cause the beneficial outlay of money and labour upon the soil is discouraged, and the quantity of produce thereby diminished. These, which I may call the economical and theoretical objections to tithe, affected Ireland practically much less than England; because, by the universal custom of the country, the amount demanded was not in proportion to the rent above one-fourth of that usually paid in England. But there were other objections, arising from the state of the country, from the irritation created in the minds of the Catholic peasantry by the direct collision with the Protestant clergy, by the numerous small claims which the infinite subdivision of land among the cottiers occasioned, which my readers will better understand by referring to the luminous exposition of Lord Stanley when Secretary for Ireland. Now for all these evils, whether apparent or real, whether theoretical or practical, whether arising out of the nature of tithe itself, or out of the peculiar state of society in Ireland, the Bill introduced in 1834* provided a full and satisfactory remedy. Tithe was converted into a fixed annual payment, varying only in proportion to the average price of corn, and all collision with the peasantry was prevented. That Bill received the cheerful assent of the Conservative party: it would have readily passed the House of Lords had it not been entirely changed in substance by the alterations introduced in Committee by Mr.

* I think by Lord Stanley before he became Secretary for the Colonies.

O'Connell. It was in all its leading provisions adopted by Sir H. Hardinge in the measure he submitted to the House at the commencement of last session. I shall therefore consider the question of the Church of Ireland, not as it exists at present, embarrassed and complicated by the confused state of the law with regard to tithe, but as it would stand if these alterations which we are desirous to make had actually been adopted. I shall not defend those objectionable parts which we are ready to remove, and which would have been removed but for the party intrigues and manœuvres of last session. I shall merely consider whether the Established Church of Ireland, when its present legal claims upon the land in the shape of tithe are commuted for a fixed annual payment made by the Protestant landowners, is in fact a grievance. I have shown in the preceding pages the importance of the interests of Protestantism in Ireland, their intimate connexion with this country, and the gross absurdity of measuring them by the standard of population only. Is then the support of the Protestant Church of Ireland—defrayed by the Protestant property of Ireland—no longer through the intervention of the Catholic occupier, but directly contributed by the Protestant landowner, a just and real cause of complaint to the Catholic population? A fixed annual rent-charge arising out of the land, regulated from time to time by the price of corn, seems to me the most unexceptionable means of providing for the support of a Church Establish-

ment, and free from all those objections which may be justly urged against tithe. The arguments against the Irish Church Establishment therefore could no longer be levelled at the mode of provision, they must be directed at the institution itself. Now sound policy and justice equally prescribe to the British statesman the maintenance of the Church of Ireland for these reasons :—

1st. It will be supported without taxing the Catholic peasantry, either really or apparently, and it will occasion no collision between the Protestant clergy and their parishioners.

2nd. It will be maintained directly by the landed property of Ireland, which is Protestant.

3rd. It is a property vested in the Church, and confirmed to it by the most solemn compact between the two countries, that of the Act of Union. Without raising that nicest and most difficult of all questions, the abstract right of the supreme power in the state to interfere with this property, it may safely be assumed that nothing but the most imperative necessity could justify it.

4th. It is cherished and revered by the whole Protestant population of Ireland, both from their ardent attachment to the religion of which it is the minister, and from their firm persuasion that it is their security against the encroaching bigotry of Popery, and against the ambition and cupidity of those who make it a cloak for the accomplishment of their temporal designs.

5th. That the feelings and opinions of the Pro-

testants, comprising the Presbyterians and followers of the Church of England, are entitled to the greatest consideration and respect, because, however numerically inferior, they unite in themselves all the other elements of social importance in a civilized community, education, intelligence, property, and station; because they are the only portion of the nation really attached to the connexion with England; because they are right in regarding attacks upon their Church as in fact attacks upon their property, upon their existence as a part of the community, and upon the Union itself.

6th. It is the barrier against the increase of Catholicism in the lower classes, and the only means of affording a rallying point to the Protestants, who, in Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, are as it were overwhelmed by the rapid multiplication of the pauper Catholic population. The Establishment is reproached with having failed to accomplish its purposes, since its followers have diminished, while the rival faith has added to its numbers. The causes of this and the difficulties with which it has to contend may be gathered from the preceding remarks. Catholicism has increased because poverty has multiplied, and also because the scattered Protestants in the lower classes, insulated among the followers of a hostile creed, exposed often to persecution, and always to be singled out as the objects of dislike, estrangement, and suspicion, have been gradually compelled either to emigrate or to abjure their religion. But because the Church Establish-

ment has been unequal altogether to cope with these difficulties, it must not be abandoned as utterly inefficient, unless we would desire the total extirpation of the Protestant faith. Let it, on the contrary, receive every reform of which it is susceptible, for the purpose of adding to its influence and efficiency.

7th. An institution providing for the residence of clergymen of the Church of England in the remote rural parishes, is fraught with so many important benefits to a country like Ireland, that even did it not exist, and were not that existence linked with so many precious national interests, it would be well to create it. Take even the strongest, the most extreme case, that of a parish in which there were no Protestant parishioners, the probability is that a parish so circumstanced would contain a population consisting entirely of the peasantry. If there were resident landlords, resident middle-men, resident traders, the inference would be that there were some Protestants. An exclusively Catholic population would be a population of cottiers and of small farmers not much raised above them. Now in such a community, would not the residence of a gentleman having received a liberal education, on whom a sacred profession imposes the duties of morality and religion, whose relation to themselves gives them a claim upon his good offices, who takes nothing from them, and who spends a moderate income among them, be productive of the greatest possible advantage? Can we refuse to admit that

as missionaries of civilization, as well as of religion, this distribution of resident ministers among this wild population must be fraught with inestimable benefit? As the channels of something like English feeling, as the means of retaining some hold of the people, as the formation of centres round which Protestantism may rally, as the organs of many temporal advantages to the peasantry, the establishment of these outposts and videttes of the Church of England seems grounded in true policy.

8th. A Protestant government, the head of a great Protestant empire, however it may act upon the wise and beneficent principles of toleration, cannot and ought not to push them so far as to regard the two religions with absolute indifference. The interests, the support, the extension of the Protestant faith, ought to be more precious to it than that of the Catholic. It should not oppress or injure the latter, but it ought to foster, protect, and encourage the former. A certain degree of partiality where it is confined to proper limits, where it does not go the length of injustice, where it merely shows itself in a desire to promote the diffusion of that mode of worship which is professed by the empire, is a natural result of sincerity in the belief of its superiority.

I have endeavoured to present to my readers those arguments, arising out of the peculiar state of Ireland and the singular position in which the two religions are placed, which appear to me to prove the policy of sustaining the Protestants and the

Church of Ireland against the extraordinary pressure of the Popish party. I shall not lengthen this chapter by examining in detail Lord John Russell's expedient of devoting a portion of the Church revenues to the purposes of general education, embodied in his resolution. Could this proposition be weighed calmly, distinct from the party feelings in which it originated, and without reference to the party objects which it was designed to accomplish, its weakness and nullity would require no comment. Outraging the feelings of the Protestants, introducing a principle which must sweep away their Church, it does not pretend to satisfy the Catholics; it is accepted as a thing of no value except in so far as it introduces the point of the wedge.

As a means of thoroughly embroiling the question, of preventing any satisfactory adjustment of it, it appears to have answered its end. It would be superfluous to reason upon it as a system adapted to tranquillize the feuds or to ameliorate the condition of the Irish people, since these are objects which it never was intended to effect.

Such are the views and opinions upon which the Conservative body rest their defence of the maintenance and integrity of the Irish Church, when the proposed reforms shall have added to its efficiency, and removed the objections arising from the present system of tithe. These opinions are the very reverse of intolerant or bigoted; they are founded upon a just and comprehensive estimate of the claims of the two religious parties; they are not

formed in a spirit of hostility to the Catholics; they do not exclude every measure of conciliation; they are wholly defensive, they only repel encroachment. We merely declare that an institution, the temporal benefits of which are great and common to the followers of both religions, which is protected by national engagements of the most solemn nature, which is cherished by the most valuable portion of our Irish fellow-subjects, which is the strongest link between the two countries, which is the most efficacious instrument for scattering the seeds of civilization and improvement in remote and barbarous districts, shall not, with our consent, be sacrificed by party intrigues to the most formidable enemy, to the greatness and prosperity of the British empire.



